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The Sport Detective's Grip;



THE HORSES WERE RUSHING ALONG WILDLY AND EVERY EYE MARKED
THEIR FLIGHT WITH ZEST.

OR, BOUNCING

The Race-Course Bettors.

A STORY OF

Sheepshead Bay Bookmakers.

BY WM. H. MANNING,

AUTHOR OF "PLUNGER PETE," "STEVE
STARR," "OLD DOUBLEDARK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY.

THE man was a spy. He had gained situation near enough to a door so he could see and listen, and he was drinking in all that transpired in the room beyond. His lips curled in a sneer, and he muttered:

"A fine gang, that! Gone clean daft over a horse. A mother could not be more thoughtful of the welfare of her child than they are of the horse they call Aztec Chief. Why? Simply because they hope the animal to win some big race they have their minds on. They are all bound up in it, and know nothing else. What they can see in horses running desperately for a mile or so I can't understand, yet all New York is crazy on the subject."

If this spy did not take an interest in horse-racing he certainly did in the interview between the men, and it did not appear to be a friendly interest, either.

Now and then he muttered to himself, and his hands were clinched, and his face, always marked with strong passions, moved with some all-powerful emotion and grew dark and repelling.

"So, Charles Gaston," he muttered, "you hope to win big money with Aztec Chief, do you? Gar! I'd like to poison the brute and kill your chances. Yes, poison the horse or—you!"

If his mind ran on poison his hand did not keep it exact company. The hand sought his pocket, and came out holding a revolver. He raised it and covered one of the men.

"Gaston," he whispered, "I could shoot you where you sit!"

It was no joke on his part, for the sudden gleaming of his eyes spoke even more decidedly than his lips, but he suddenly thrust the revolver back in his pocket, as if afraid to hold it.

"I can wait," he added.

For awhile longer he lingered where he could watch, and then stepped back into the middle of the corridor.

"What do I care for their race-horse talk?" he muttered, in disgust. "It is nothing to me, and I may be seen by them if I stay here. Yes, and then Jones may come along and notice me."

The man last mentioned was the landlord of the house. Mr. Jones called the place the Old Fort Hotel, and it did smack of that class of New York hotels that are a cross between a regular house and a boarding place. Mr. Jones kept boarders, some of whom smiled at his fancy for using the word hotel, but it amused him and did harm to nobody.

The man who had been acting the spy on the race-track company would have been all right if he had kept his self-promise and retreated at once, but he fell into thought and stood still. Thus, he did not hear the sounds inside which indicated that the party was breaking up, and his first warning came when the door opened and three men stood in front of him.

Two of them appeared to see nothing in the presence of the prowler, but the third flushed with anger.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he demanded, sharply.

The late spy looked the questioner full in the face.

"Is that any of your business?" he asked, bluntly.

"Yes, it is."

"I don't see it that way."

"You are here in a very suspicious way—"

"The hall is free to all."

"Hang it! This is not the first time I have caught you near my door, Ben Lomond. You seem bound to play the sneak. Why is it?"

The spy frowned.

"Sneak, did you say, Charles Gaston?"

"That's just what I did say."

"I want you to take it back," answered the spy, in a low, deep voice. "I don't allow any man to talk that way to me. You and I both board here, Gaston, and we have common rights. Because I happen to be in the hall I will not allow you to insult me. Do you hear?"

"I do hear, Ben Lomond. We will leave it all to Landlord Jones to-morrow. If he says that it is all right that I should find you prowling near my door every time I open it you can have the privilege, and I will seek other quarters. If I stay here I will not have you sneaking around and acting the spy on me."

"Sneaking?"

"That's what I said. What of it?" asked Gaston, belligerently.

"This!"

Ben Lomond shot out his clinched hand,

and Gaston was felled to the floor like a log. He was not a young man, but even at that he was not long down. He leaped up, full of rage.

"You dog!" he cried, "I will—"

He pulled a revolver from his pocket, but one of his companions caught his hand.

"No, no! Don't do that Charley!" he urged. "No bloodshed!"

Gaston was not deaf to reason, and he hesitated only a moment before returning the revolver to his pocket.

"I never did harm to a human being," he remarked in a thick voice, "and I will not begin now. You can have the empty triumph which this affords you, knave; I am not a tough. Still, I warn you to keep out of my way after this. No more prowling around my door, or I may lose my temper."

Ben Lomond, since he struck the blow had been watching alertly for what might come. He was now quick with this retort:

"If you ever lift a hand against me, Charles Gaston, I am likely to use more than my fists. I carry a revolver, too, and I will shoot you, if you provoke me further."

"Enough of that!" exclaimed one of Gaston's companions. "I will not stand here and listen to such talk. Gaston, this fellow seems to be pretty near half crazy, anyhow—let us leave him."

"You can't go too soon!" exclaimed Ben Lomond.

Not one of the party was of the sort to whom blows were unknown. On the contrary, whatever might be the goodness or the evil in their natures they were rough and ready men, though minus the signs which go to mark the tough. If they were not all angel, they did not appear to be all devil.

Signs are sometimes deceptive, however.

The disposition of the three friends to ignore the single man was not changed. They went away promptly, and were soon by the outer door. Gaston opened it and looked out.

"Rain is still falling, boys, he remarked.

"Come into the bar-room and have a drink before you go."

"I have had enough already," replied one of the visitors. "Wetness within will not keep off wetness without. I reckon we will skip the drink with thanks. Good-night, Charley!"

"Good-night, boys. Handle your books well on the big event, Luke, for Aztec Chief is sure to win."

"So you and Arad say."

"You bet we say so!" exclaimed the third man. "If Aztec Chief don't win in a walk you can call me a clam."

"And we will make a selling-plater of the Chief, won't we, Arad?" added Gaston.

"That we will."

"Horse-owners are always confident about this time of year, but we poor devils of book-makers have to go light," replied Luke.

"Anyhow, don't forget the yellow and blue bars of Gaston & Frederickson."

"I hope you will win. Come, Arad, the rain has let up a bit. Let us be off."

Good nights were repeated, and then the visitors hurried off. Mr. Gaston turned and entered the house.

"Luke is a skeptic in regard to Aztec Chief, but the horse will pull off the purse," he murmured, as he moved up-stairs to his room again. "This will be a big season for us."

He went to his room and proceeded to get ready for bed. He had a plain room, its most conspicuous ornaments being pictures of various horses, one of which was marked "Aztec Chief." He paused before this picture and looked at it searchingly.

"Where can you find a cleaner bit of horse-flesh?" he muttered. "Oh! there ain't a doubt; he will be a winner."

Indulging in thoughts like these, and apparently having forgotten Ben Lomond wholly, Gaston went to bed. He did not take any precautions to render the room specially impregnable to intruders, for he had little there to tempt a thief, and was not one to think of thieves, anyhow.

The room was soon dark and still.

It was some hours later than this that a patrolman turned into the block on which stood the hotel.

"A mean, miserable night," he muttered, shaking off the rain irritably. "If I had my way I would send every police officer home

on such a night, and make it a life sentence for every criminal caught outside, no matter what his errand might be. It would be a rascally fellow who would come out to break the law in this weather."

The patrolman did not mean what he said, but the war of the elements had soured his disposition and kept his favorite lady friend from meeting him on his beat, and he did not take it kindly.

Suddenly he stirred into life.

"What the dickens!" he cried, and then ran forward hastily.

He had seen something unusual ahead of him—a man and a horse lying motionless on the pavement. The horse was attached to a wagon, and in the middle of the street, while the man was nearer the sidewalk.

"What sort of an accident is this?" wondered the patrolman.

He reached the side of the man and stooped to investigate his condition. His hand was almost at the man's arm when he abruptly sprang back as if he had been threatened with a blow. Yet, the unknown person had not moved in the least, and no other human being was near. To a casual observer there seemed to be no cause for fear, yet the burly policeman stood with his face giving plain evidence that he really was frightened.

He looked down at the ground with the mood growing on him. Some terrible object appeared to menace him there. Then the mystery of its nature vanished as he muttered:

"A live wire!"

He had not lived in New York for nothing, and when he saw a bit of loose wire dangling along the pavement he believed he knew what had prostrated the unknown man and the horse. Both lay on the loose end of the wire, the upper end of which was affixed to the telegraph pole overhead.

He did not want to tackle that thing. He was hired to keep the peace, and, incidentally, to fight men who did not keep it but not to wrestle with a live wire.

Uncertain what to do he rapped for aid, and a second patrolman quickly appeared on the scene.

"What is it?" asked the new-comer.

"A man and a horse killed by a live wire!"

The statement seemed to be true, but the time was coming when serious doubts would be cast on its reliability. Unknown to him, the first patrolman had been chosen by fate to be the discoverer of what was at once a mystery and a crime.

"We must get the man away," said the second officer.

"Do you want the job?"

"No. That wire has two deaths to answer for now, and if we try to pull this fellow away we shall get knocked over like ten-pins."

The first officer looked for a moment, and then nerved himself to a pitch of courage and made a dash. He seized the fallen man and, by means of a sudden jerk, pulled him away from the wire. In doing this he did not escape scathless, for he was neatly flung to the pavement. He rose quickly.

"Are you hurt?" asked his companion.

"Well, I got enough electricity to satisfy my greed, but I guess I am none the worse for it."

He knelt by the unknown man.

"Dead!" he commented.

"The wire has its victim."

"Yes. I wonder who he is? He is well dressed for a man who was driver of such an old wagon as that."

"So he is."

"Still, he must be the driver, I suppose."

"Ah! here comes somebody else. Four men, and all officers but one."

The quartette mentioned hurried up.

"What's this?" asked one of the newly-arrived blue-coats.

"Live wire, and a dead horse and driver," replied the first patrolman.

"Not much!" exclaimed the man who was not in uniform. "I was the driver of that turn-out."

"Then who is the dead man?"

"Blamed if I know. I was driving along here when my horse dropped flat. I soon discovered what the trouble was, and, instead of monkeying with the wire, I hastened to the police station for help. The dead man was not here when I went, and I

don't know who he is, or how he got into this difficulty."

"A total stranger, eh?"

"Yes."

"That is odd."

"Not at all," replied the leader of the newly-arrived officers. "He is some pedestrian who happened along, and was not aware that a live wire meant a dead man, if he tackled it. Simple enough. Any life at all in him?"

"No."

"The tragedy seems to have been unseen by everybody, so his identity will have to be solved by slow process. Next time he sees a dead horse he will let it alone."

"We must take measures to have the current shut off before the wire gets in its work on somebody else. The fiendish thing is a holy terror. Score one, more for electricity."

"Pick the body up!" directed the police leader.

Just then a new-comer pushed his way through the crowd.

"This is my house right here," he remarked, "and if there is any possibility of saving his life— Why, great heavens!" he added, breaking off and starting nervously.

"What is it?"

"Why, this man is Charles Gaston!"

CHAPTER II.

AFTER THE TRAGEDY.

THE last speaker at once became the center of attention, and the leading policeman quickly asked:

"Who do you say he was?"

"Charles Gaston, one of my boarders."

"And who are you?"

"My name is Jones, and I keep this hotel."

The speaker pointed to the building in front of which they stood, and the inquirer replied:

"Oh! is that it? Well, your boarder seems to have ended his stay with you abruptly. He should have known better than to fool with a live wire."

"It is astonishing that he should have done so, for he was a well-informed man, but I suppose he did not see it. Great heavens! but this is a shock! Charley Gaston dead! Why, it is amazing, and he was a well man only a few minutes ago."

"Who and what was he?"

"A racing man, and half-owner of the running horse Aztec Chief. He is well known at Sheepshead, Gravesend, and all the other courses. It is all over now, and he will never again send his horse around the track. Amazing! And it was only this evening that Arad Frederickson, his partner, and Luke Pinkney, the bookmaker, were in here to see him."

Landlord Jones seemed sincerely shocked, but the policeman looked at the matter in a matter-of-fact way.

"Has he relatives here?"

"No."

"Do you know where they live?"

"No. I don't know that he had any relatives. He has been with me in my hotel for two years, but, as far as I know, his only visitors in that time have been racing men—horse-owners, bookmakers, jockeys and the like."

"I saw a reporter here a short time ago. He has now rushed off, and his paper will have a full account to-morrow. Relatives will show up if there are such, so we need not bother ourselves about it. Will you harbor his body until the coroner has seen it?"

"Of course!" quickly answered Jones.

"I won't go back on poor Charley in his hour of trouble. It is queer how he died."

"Not at all. He went to help the dead horse, not seeing the wire; and the wire did its work. Simple enough. Carry him in."

Nobody but Jones appeared to see anything worthy of attention in the affair. At that time death by means of live wires were not uncommon, and Charles Gaston seemed merely to be one of the many victims. Jones was surprised, but it did not occur to him that there was more to it than appeared on the surface.

The body was carried in, and the crowd melted away.

The reporter who had been on the scene

had been obliged to leave early to get his news into the morning paper, and, as he had gone before the discovery of Gaston's identity had been made, his journal merely recorded, the next day, that an unknown man had been found dead, a victim to a live wire. That seemed to settle it, and people simply commented on live wires as destroying agents.

How was it nearer the scene of action?

Mr. Jones had finished his breakfast when a coroner put in an appearance accompanied by a police sergeant. They looked at the body in a perfunctory way.

"Simple case," commented the coroner.

"We shall keep on having them as long as telephone and telegraph wires cross as they do now."

"That's it," agreed the sergeant.

"Gentlemen," replied Jones, "I don't understand all this."

"Why not?"

"Charley Gaston was not the man to be up at late hours when he had nothing to keep him up. Last night he had visitors in the person of Arad Frederickson, his partner in the running horse Aztec Chief, and Mr. Pinkney, the bookmaker. When they left the hour was still early, and yet, when I passed Charley's door, an hour later, his light was out and he was in bed."

"Abed? Are you sure?"

"Yes. I called to him and asked him the address of a man I wanted to see. He gave it to me, and then I went out to the address. I had just got back when I appeared among those around the body in the street. Now, why did Gaston get up, go out in the rain and get tangled up in that infernal wire?"

"As to that, we know he did."

"It is confounded queer."

"It is plain enough. Gaston saw the dead horse, and probably believed he could do some good. Not suspecting the danger, he was caught by the wire. His liking for a horse led to his death."

"I never would have thought him so careless as to run onto a live wire."

"Here is the evidence," and the coroner pointed to the body. "That settles it, and tells just how he died."

"Pardon me, sir, but I do not think so."

It was a low, mild voice near the door which spoke the last words, and coroner and boarding-house keeper turned. Before them stood a slender, peculiar-looking old man who returned their gaze quietly.

"What's that?" asked the coroner.

"I think," answered the old man, "that Mr. Gaston was dead when he first touched the wire."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because there was no sign of life when they carried him out and put him on the wire."

"Carried him out? What's that? Who carried him out? No sign of life? What do you mean?" rapidly demanded the coroner.

"Why, sir, I saw him carried out by two men and dropped down right there by the wire. Somehow, I think he must have been dead then."

"Professor," cried Jones, "are you awake or dreaming?"

"Wide awake, sir," politely responded the old man.

"What do you mean by all this? Who carried him out? Where did they carry him from?"

"From our house, sir."

"Carried him out? Professor, what do you mean? Who did it?—who carried him out, I say?"

"I did not recognize them, sir, but it was as I have said, sir."

The professor was a very mild-looking man, and he never had been more mild or unconcerned of manner than when he put this surprising information into the case. He stood bland and easy, while all the other inmates of the room stared at him in wonder and excitement.

The coroner turned to Jones.

"You seem to know this man. Who is he?"

"Another of my lodgers, sir."

"Ah! and he says that Gaston was carried out and put on the wire—carried out from your house—"

"No, no!" interrupted Jones, "we surely must have misunderstood him in this

particular. Professor, you don't, you can't mean that he was carried out from our house?"

"He was, Mr. Jones," placidly answered the professor.

"Where were you that you saw it?" asked the coroner.

"At my window, on the upper floor, sir."

"What were you doing there?"

"Trying to get view of the stars, sir."

"On a rainy night?"

"I thought it possible that the clouds might lift, sir. You see, sir, I am an astronomer, and I write predictions and horoscopes for the newspapers, and—"

"Are you really in earnest in saying that you saw him carried out by two men and laid on the wire?" interrupted the coroner, quickly.

"I am, sir. It is just as I have said. Of course I would not jest on such a subject."

"Then," cried the coroner, "we have found, not merely a tragedy, but a crime—perhaps a murder!"

Everything that was prosaic and commonplace vanished from the case as these words entered into it. Complete and sudden was the change.

The professor had made his statements without seeming to have the slightest idea of what they naturally pointed to, but such was not the case with the other men in the room. All had grown more or less alert and excited, and when the coroner flashed forth the words last recorded he took a forward step toward his companions, his face flushed and his manner tense and nervous.

"Yes," he repeated, "we may have stumbled upon a murder mystery!"

"But where is the evidence that the man died an unnatural death?" asked the police sergeant.

"Where's the evidence that he died a natural one?"

"You have not found any marks of violence."

"Because I was fool enough to imagine that the presence of the live wire settled everything," confessed the coroner, with mixed frankness and shame. "I am afraid this is not the first time that a like blunder has been made by a coroner. As to the question of whether he died a natural death, why should anybody have lugged him out of the house in the night-time and storm, and laid him so carefully on what they of course knew was a live wire, unless it was to try to conceal a crime?"

"Do you see the position you put my house in?" asked Jones, nervously.

"Well, it looks as if murder was done there."

"So it does, and it is a crusher. My house the scene of a murder? Why, it is awful; that it is!" and Mr. Jones waved his hands tragically.

"Mr. Jones did not have any part in it," calmly pursued the professor. "He was down by the door, outside the house, when I first heard the suspicious sounds in Gaston's room."

"What's that?" exclaimed the coroner. "What suspicious sounds did you hear in his room?"

"Well, first of all, there was a sound as if somebody had fallen, and then I heard a groan. Thinking Mr. Gaston might have injured himself, I went to his door. I tried it; it was locked. Then I spoke to him, and he answered that it was all right, and he had merely let a valise fall on his foot, which hurt him for a time. He did not open the door, but this explanation satisfied me, and I went away. I think now it may have been suspicious."

"I should say so. Yet, you say he answered you."

"Well, I supposed it was him who answered."

"Are you not sure?"

"No."

"Did you hear more from the room?"

"No, sir."

"How long before the body was carried out?"

"Half an hour, perhaps."

"Gaston did not move when he was laid on the wire?"

"No."

"Why have you been so slow in telling this?"

"I did not know of it before."

The coroner managed to take Jones aside without exciting notice.

"Who and what is this professor?" he inquired.

"A man with the mind of a child. He is very learned in matters pertaining to the sky, and knows but little about the earth. He writes up horoscopes and such trash for the papers, and is a shining light in skyey circles, I suppose, but, land of love! he ain't more practical than a three-year-old child. He sits by his window about all night, looking at the stars if they are out, and watching for them to come out if they are invisible."

"Isn't it odd that he should let Gaston lay there and say nothing, not even when the body was found?"

"Not to those who know Professor Pillsbury—that's his name. He is so confounded eccentric that nothing is odd that he does. If he should do one thing like you or me it would be odd indeed in him."

"It may be all right."

"I see you are a bit suspicious of him. Don't let that rest on your mind; a more simple-hearted, honest man than John Pillsbury never lived."

"I'll take your word for it. We must, however, face the fact, that Charles Gaston was murdered in your house by somebody."

"Horrible fact!" groaned Jones.

"Queer case, too. The whole city will soon be talking of the live wire tragedy, as people will talk of murders that have unusual features in their train. A strange case."

"Who could have done it?"

"Who were Gaston's associates?"

"Horsemen. As I told you, he owned the running horse in company with one Arad Frederickson. Horse-owners, trainers, jockeys and bookmakers were his companions, and his only companions."

"A bad lot."

"Not much!" snapped Jones. "There are bad men among the craft, same as there is among all professions, but horsemen are no worse than other men."

"We will let that rest. Do you know where the partner of the dead man lives?"

"No but I think the Directory may tell."

"Look in it. If you learn anything, send for this Arad Frederickson. First, however, send a messenger-boy to me, so I can notify Police Headquarters. In the mean while I will look for the cause of Charles Gaston's death."

"No blood was shed."

"So it seems."

Jones went on his errand, and in a short time messengers had been dispatched for a detective and for Frederickson.

The coroner proceeded with his examination as far as he could pending a regular post-mortem investigation, and the result was finally communicated to Jones.

"I think he died from the blow of a slung-shot."

"Ah!"

"The direct cause was a severe shock to the brain, and the theory I have mentioned explains how it happened. I should say—"

"Merciful heavens!"

The exclamation came from a point near the door, and the coroner wheeled suddenly. A woman was in the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE CITY MISSIONARY.

WORDS convey ideas strongly, but they are not the only medium for expressing thoughts, and tone and manner often tell more than mere words—often tell more than the speaker wishes to have known.

Even before the coroner could turn he had felt that something of importance was before him, and he was eager to see who had uttered the words last given.

He saw a woman of about twenty-five years, and of eminently respectable appearance. Casually seen, she was, he had to admit, the last person one would think of associating with a tragedy, but he did not fail to find her interesting now.

She was looking at the body of Charles Gaston, and her pale face and agitated manner told of deep feeling.

The coroner flashed a look of inquiry at Jones, but wholly failed to get that gentleman's attention. He wondered who this

new-comer was, but the answer did not appear.

As for the young woman, she did not raise her gaze from the body, and the coroner broke the silence.

"Is this one of your family, Mr. Jones?"

Then she started and looked up suddenly. The landlord quickly responded:

"She's a total stranger to me."

"Then why is she here?"

"I don't know."

"We shall have to leave it to her to explain."

It was a direct invitation to tell the facts, but the young woman did not appear calm enough for that.

"What—what is this?" she faltered, pointing to Gaston's body.

"A dead man!" bluntly returned the coroner.

"When did he die?"

"Last night."

"I did not know he was ill."

"People sometimes die suddenly."

"But I—I wanted to see him."

"You have come too late."

"Did he leave any word? His papers—"

She stopped and looked around the room as if she expected to see the articles she had named.

"What papers?" asked the coroner, gently and soothingly.

"A letter—a statement—"

"Of what?"

The coroner was trying to be wily, but he was not equal to the task. In the last question he had been too explicit, and the result was immediately seen. The young woman started again, and the pallor of her face was succeeded by a sudden flush. She seemed to struggle for mastery, and then her manner became guarded.

"Was he ill but a short time?" she inquired.

"Only that."

"It is dreadful."

"Are you a relative?"

"No."

"Oh! I see; merely a friend."

Several changes went rapidly over her face. The coroner could not read them, though they puzzled him. Then she pressed her hand over her heart for a moment and became calm.

"You are in error," she quietly replied. "My acquaintance with Mr. Gaston was merely one of business."

"I thought he was a race-track man."

"So he was," readily answered the girl, "and it was because of that that I had business with him. He has in his employ a jockey named Jimmy Newdick. I—I have been trying to have him persuade young Newdick to abandon the race-course. I do not think it is good for him."

"The jockey is a relative of yours, I take it."

"No, but I know his relatives—poor and honest people—and it was for their sake I wanted Jimmy to abandon the track."

"Was it that brought you here now?"

"Yes, sir."

The reply was received in silence, but the coroner was not satisfied. He had arrived at the decision that the girl knew Gaston in a way more than casual, and he could not believe at that time that her late emotion had been caused solely by sight of a dead man. Perhaps he was over-anxious to see his theory confirmed that he had stumbled on a full-sized mystery, however.

Landlord Jones had been doing some looking on his own account.

"Seems to me I have seen you before, miss," he remarked.

"I hardly think so, sir," she responded.

"Haven't you been here before to see Gaston?"

A moment of hesitation, and then the answer:

"Yes."

"Aren't you a missionary?"

Another momentary hesitation.

"I am Elzora Ames, a city missionary," she returned.

The coroner's face fell. His theory seemed to be drifting away and leaving only a prosaic female reformer in its place.

He was nursing his disappointment when steps sounded heavily in the hall and another man entered quickly.

"Arad Frederickson!" exclaimed Jones.

The new-comer apparently saw only the face of his late partner, and upon that he bestowed a long and excited survey. Then he turned abruptly to Jones.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded. "Gaston dead, and by violence?"

"That is the present belief, Mr. Frederickson," answered Jones.

"Murdered?"

"So it seems."

"Then it was done by that big brute of a Ben Lomond."

"What?" exclaimed Jones, startled.

"I say that Ben Lomond did it."

"Why should he?"

"Didn't you know of their quarrel?"

"No."

"They quarreled, fought, and Gaston was knocked down by Lomond. Ay, Lomond then made threats against Gaston."

"Great Caesar!" groaned Jones, "am I to lose another boarder?"

At this moment Elzora Ames went quietly out of the room. The coroner followed her. He had noticed that the arrival of Frederickson meant something to Elzora. When the horse-owner entered the room he had plainly given her a start, and she had seemed frightened anew. She had looked at him as if she saw some personal enemy, or some one likely to do her injury.

Frederickson had not noticed her, it seemed, and the coroner was impressed with the belief that she was seeking to avoid being noticed by him later on. Thus, the coroner followed her with his suspicions again aroused. He readily overtook her.

"Miss Ames!" he spoke.

She turned with a start, and then seemed reassured when she saw who it was.

"Were you going?" he added.

"Yes."

Almost defiant was her manner, and he spoke in his most amiable manner as he pursued:

"If possible, delay leaving the hotel. I want to get all possible light, but, just now, I am needed in the other room. Will you kindly remain in the parlor until I am at liberty so I can see you?"

"I know of nothing to tell you."

"All things count now, and even knowledge of the jockey you have named may help. Will you wait?"

"Yes, I will be in the parlor."

"Thank you."

The coroner turned back to the room of death. He knitted his brows in a thoughtful frown as he did so.

"She does not look like one to do a criminal act, or to have part in it, but there is more than I have heard between her and Charles Gaston. She does not hide her secrets well. There is something. What?"

Arad Frederickson was loudly demanding that Ben Lomond be produced, and Jones sent a messenger to find him. Mr. Lomond was not found; he was not in the hotel.

The coroner asked particulars as to the quarrel between Lomond and Gaston, and shook his head when he heard of it in full.

"Who is this Lomond?" he asked, of Jones.

"Well, he's a comparatively new lodger, and I know but little of him."

"Is he a well appearing man?"

"Well appearing?" cried Arad. "Why, he looks like a cut-throat!"

"Not so bad as that," protested Jones.

"He is a middle-aged man of marked looks, and long residence in foreign lands has changed him so he is not just like an American. He often tells of the Bushmen of Africa, and I think he has been there a good deal."

"A wild, hot-tempered fellow, I'll be sworn!" added Arad.

"We shall have an officer here from the Police Headquarters soon," added the coroner, "and when he comes he must know of this Ben Lomond. It seems there is no more for me to do now, so I will go."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jones, "what has become of Miss Elzora Ames?"

"Who?" asked Arad, with a start.

"Elzora Ames."

"What of her?"

"She was here a moment ago."

"The dickens she was!"

"Do you know her?" asked the coroner, quietly.

"Do I?" cried Frederickson.

Other words seemed to be hovering on his lips, but he checked his speech with a sudden effort and answered quite calmly.

"Not to my knowledge, but I was wondering what woman would be here to see Gaston or learn of him. He was not a ladies' man."

"Where is she, Mr. Coroner?" asked Jones.

"She waits for me in the parlor," explained the official, irritably, annoyed to see that if Arad had a secret he was not going to tell it. "Excuse me now, gentlemen. I will see you later, and when the detective comes I must see him, surely."

"We will call you."

The coroner went down the stairs, his head bowed in thought.

"Do I dream all this?" he wondered "or is there an air of mystery on all sides? Have Frederickson and Miss Ames alike a secret to hold? I may be too ready to get a clue, and I am not a detective. If I were, I should look into the past history of these two. Mysterious Ben Lomond may have made certain threats, but have Arad and Miss Ames so much fog on the brain as they pretend?"

The speaker was in the parlor for half an hour. Then Miss Ames came out and started off down the street. Her steps were quick and her manner nervous, and she was not reassured when steps near her were followed by the utterance of her name. She turned; Arad was there.

"Pardon me," he spoke, with a peculiar smile, "but will you delay long enough to let me compare notes with you on the murder?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLEAR GRIT SPORT.

Down on a humble street of lower New York another so-called hotel was situated. Men who keep a saloon and have rooms to let over it like to apply the word "hotel" to their place, and it does nobody serious harm, though it is a libel on the hotels of the better class.

Back of the bar room, in the building last referred to, was a reading room, and it was occupied by several persons on the morning when Landlord Jones's hotel was seeing the scenes of the last chapters.

In the reading-room of the second hotel conversation was mostly of horses and horse-racing. This was not uncommon. The place had a reputation as a resort of men who followed the races as owners or bettors, and they made it a regular thing to gather there.

One of the party on this morning was a boy of perhaps seventeen; a lithe, clean built, sharp-faced youth who had a particularly wide-awake air. Young as he was, he seemed to receive more attention than anybody else there.

"I say, Jimmy," suddenly spoke one of the party, "do you ride Skyrocket, to-morrow?"

"That's the programme," replied the boy.

"Will he win the third race?"

"He won't win any other."

"Of course not, for he isn't in any other, is he?"

"No."

"Then he can't win any other, can he?"

"You figger it about right, Tommy."

"Is he a good thing?"

"Wal, I reckon he will win ef no other horse gets to the wire ahead o' him."

"Confound it! don't be so secretive. I want to get inside facts."

"I s'pose you will be there as a tout, Tommy?"

"Nothin' else, Jimmy."

"There are good horses in the third event."

"Is Hannah Cook dangerous?"

"Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Take a look, an' you won't need ter ask me. Hannah looks tucked up, an' there are rumors that she has got ter be fired fer a splint."

"She won last week under a chokin' pull."

"Last week ain't this week, an' nothin' gets out o' kilter quicker than a race-hoss. Then, again, when Hannah won, the jockeys

played tag with the starter at the post, an' Simcoe an' Nettle got so nervous they was no good. Joe Binks was pacemaker, but his rider took him wide at the turn, an' it was all up with him. Then Hannah was asked the question, an' she came into the stretch with her mouth wide open. Her nearest rival quit dead, an' there was really only two horses in it. Brother John held on for awhile, but he hadn't the wind, an' he died away. He wasn't in the same class, anyhow an' ef the cunnin' of the jockeys had not killed the best o' the lot at the post, Hannah never would have won under a pull."

Jimmy rattled off this mass of technical information glibly, and Tommy took it all in, but he did not seem to be much pleased.

"You are very full of information about races that have been run," grumbled the tout.

"Even the talent go wide on races sometimes; how can you expect me ter pick a winner?" asked Jimmy, innocently, but with a twinkle in his eyes. Then he suddenly added: "Here comes a man who can give you pointers fer keeps."

"Who is he?"

"Lee Westervelt. Men call him The Clear Grit Sport, an' he is all o' that. He never goes ter a bookmaker as a piker, but plunges every time he touches a race."

The man who was thus highly praised was certainly a person to whom nature had been kind. He was less than thirty years old, and his physical powers were at their best. He was somewhat above the medium height, and round of frame and strongly built.

Fault surely could be found with his choice of dress, for he was attired flashily, but his face was one which brought him out of the mire of this mistake of taste. It was a firm, manly face, and it looked to be the index of a square man, besides.

Seeing Jimmy, he approached and greeted the jockey cordially.

"How goes it, young Centaur?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Prime, prime, boss!" declared Jimmy.

"Sit down, won't you? Mr. Westervelt, this is Tommy Meehan. He plays the races."

"Gives tips, I think," calmly replied the Clear Grit Sport.

"So you know me?" returned Tommy, not very well satisfied.

"I have seen you in the betting ring, on the lawn and around the paddock."

"I don't remember you."

"I rarely forget a face," answered the Sport, quietly. "Jimmy, how is the racing business, anyhow?"

"Boss, I am all done up!" sighed the jockey. "Did you see the mornin' papers?"

"Yes, casually."

"One o' my reg'lar employers is dead. Charley Gaston had the poor taste ter run onter a live wire, an' it killed him before you could say Billy Patterson. Now, Arad Frederickson is my only boss in ridin' Aztec Chief."

"Don't you like that?"

"Freddy is game, but a change o' management sometimes brings other changes. I feel bad over Charley dyin' off so. He wasn't noways considerate fer me."

"Charley was well liked," added Westervelt.

"So he was."

"I never heard that he had any enemy."

"He hadn't."

"Still," pursued the Sport, thoughtfully, "that is a strong statement to make about any one. I suppose Gaston really did have some enemies."

"Not one!" asserted Jimmy.

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"No quarrels with rivals?"

"No. Gaston was square, he was."

"That's a good record for any man to leave. By the way, how is Aztec Chief doing?"

"Good!"

"Safe to bet on, eh?"

"He's as hard as a rock, an' no sign o' staleness in any way. He takes his gallops kindly, an' never squirms when he is asked the question. I wish he was in the Suburban, by jinks! Give him only about a hundred up, an' he'd make the others know they were in a horse-race. If he got left it would be an eyelash finish."

Jimmy waxed eloquent over his pet charge, and started off on a long discourse. He was listened to eagerly by nearly all who were present, being the center of the group. Nothing catches the popular fancy so much in New York as racing, and the fever glows in the blood of men who would not confess it.

Lee Westervelt was the only man who was not wholly bound up in the words of the jockey. He seemed to be an attentive listener, but his eyes lost nothing that was going on around him. This was why he noticed a solidly-built young man who came in, ordered a glass of beer, and sat down alone at one of the tables.

Lee surveyed him closely, discovering at once that he was not one of the regular frequenters of the resort.

A man on the Sport's right noticed him also.

"Know him?" he asked, of Lee.

"No."

"If you ever come home from a trip to Europe you may see him well off the coast. He is pilot of a boat."

"Oh!"

"Isaac Bartley is his name."

"Fine-looking fellow."

"He has muscle and brains. His calling isn't so very top-lofty, but he fills his post well. Nothing loose about Ike's nerves."

Just then a newsboy entered with an extra. Isaac Bartley was the only one who patronized him, though Lee kept watch of all. Isaac proceeded to scan his purchase, and Lee scanned him. Thus it was that the Sport noticed the pilot start abruptly.

Westervelt looked over his shoulder and silently read these headlines:

"Not an accident! Charles Gaston the victim of murder. A case which is full of mystery!"

Pilot Bartley leaned forward and read what followed with eager attention.

"What does he find that so wraps him up?" wondered Lee. "He really seems to be touched by this murder case. Have I come here to watch horsemen and found my light in a waterman?"

If Lee had spoken aloud his speech would have been a good deal of a mystery to those who supposed he had no motive in life other than to be a sport, but he did not give them clue to his thoughts.

He was content to watch Isaac Bartley, and the result was that his perplexity increased. Never before had he seen a man read with more avidity, and he was not prepared to believe that it was merely the attraction which murder has to the unhealthy-minded.

Isaac did not look to be of that sort.

"Did he know Gaston?" speculated Lee. "He seems actually agitated, and that means something in a man with Bartley's magnificent nerves. I wonder if he is an honest man? If he is not, did he have share in the killing of Gaston?"

Despite the fact that he gave so much attention to the reader, Lee did not grow oblivious of his immediate companions, and he answered all that was said to him.

There was nothing to tell that he was interested in the pilot.

Presently Isaac rose abruptly. He hastened to the bar.

"Give me a glass of beer!" he ordered.

"What!" quoth the barkeeper, "another? I never knew you to put down two thus?"

"It's different now," replied Isaac, with an air which repelled further questioning.

He drank the beer, and then passed out of the hotel. Down the street he went hurriedly, unconscious of the fact that he was followed. Lee Westervelt had quietly excused himself and he was on the trail of the pilot.

"I don't know why this man should interest me," murmured the pursuer, "but why should he be so broken up over Gaston's death? The most remarkable discoveries sometimes come from what seems to be nothing, and this can do no harm. If Bartley is a mystery I want to know it."

Whatever the pilot might be, Lee's friends would have voted him a mystery had they seen him and known of his pursuit. A sport, a man who appeared to have no object in life but mere pleasure, but turned spy just because another man read a paper. What did Lee mean?

CHAPTER V.

UNDER DETECTIVE MANAGEMENT.

"You are wanted up-stairs, sir."

This was the greeting which Ben Lomond received upon his return to Jones's hotel. He had come in with his usual unconcerned air, and the clerk who conveyed the information to him was led to make the remark to himself that Ben Lomond did not act like a murderer.

"Who wants me?" inquired Ben.

"Jones, sir."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere on the second floor. I think he will see you, so you won't need to hunt for him."

"How is my account? Anything due on board?"

"No."

"Then," added Ben Lomond, with a sneer, "I don't see what Jones wants me for. However, I suppose he can tell. Mister Clerk, you have long ears."

This abrupt remark did not surprise the clerk, who knew Ben Lomond of old, but it did offend him.

"They are my own."

"I can well believe it. If they were anybody's else you wouldn't have them around you. Now, when I was in Africa I have seen the bushmen make many a soup of ears—human ears, sir!"

Ben Lomond glared at the unhappy clerk, as if defying dispute, but there was none. Ben was a good pay, and his unnatural sense of humor, or of the hideous, or whatever he considered it, had to be passed over. The man who has money is a privileged character.

Ben evidently wished to draw the clerk into some argument, but as he saw the plan going for nothing, he proceeded on his way. He met Mr. Jones in the hall.

"Lomond, please come in here," requested the landlord quietly.

He indicated a room, and the traveler entered.

"I've fought a duel before now in just such a room," he remarked. "All doors closed, and each of us armed with knives. Great way of fighting a duel. I live to tell it, while the man I fought with is telling of it in some other world, I suppose—"

He stopped short. He had crossed the threshold, and now saw that he was not alone. Two other men were there—two living men—one being a policeman in uniform, and the other a cool, resolute man in citizen's clothes.

"Hallo!" harshly added Ben Lomond, "is this a reception?"

"We have called you to see Charles Gaston," answered the man in plain clothes.

"Oh! now I think of it, this is his room," responded Lomond. "Where is he?"

"There!"

The speaker pointed to the bed, and Ben Lomond turned his gaze accordingly. The dead man was there, but the sight did not give Ben the least visible shock. He looked long and hard, heedless of the fact that he was under observation, too, and then lifted his eyes with what seemed to be mild surprise.

"Why," he coolly exclaimed, "The old chap is dead!"

Landlord Jones had an unpleasant shock. If a cat had been under notice Lomond would not have shown more stolid indifference.

"He is dead," agreed the man in plain clothes.

"That's good!"

"Good?"

"Yes."

"Why do you think so?"

"He was a knave, and the sooner he's out of the way, the better."

"He was murdered."

"Somebody else felt as I do, I reckon," calmly pursued Ben Lomond.

The policeman looked hard at Jones and shook his head. He believed they had to deal with a madman or a human monster. Even in his official life he had not been accustomed to see such men as this swarthy-faced scoffer.

Only the man in plain clothes remained calm.

"When did you see Mr. Gaston last?"

"Last night."

"Was he then alone?"

Ben Lomond's gaze had returned to the dead man. He appeared to find some attraction there, if not an object of pity. Now he raised his eyes, slowly and calmly, and regarded his questioner.

"Who are you that wants to know so much?" he asked.

"My name," answered the man in plain clothes, "is Nathan Short, and I am a detective."

"Ah! did you ever detect anything?" sneered Ben Lomond.

"I live in hopes," serenely replied Nathan. "I think you did not answer my question, Mr. Lomond."

"Oh! rubbish! What do I care about this business? Nothing! I'll leave you to your dry-bone picking."

The usual sneer was on his face, but as he turned away Nathan interrupted coolly.

"One moment, sir. I believe you and Gaston were not friends."

"Friends? Why, I hated the knave!"

"You quarreled with him."

"Yes, and I knocked him down."

"After that you threatened him?"

"Very likely I did. If I didn't it was an oversight, for I intended to knock him out."

Nathan Short was an imperturbable man usually, but he betrayed surprise now. This was the first time he had ever heard any one speak so frankly when an unsolved murder case was under notice.

"Are you sure you have not done so already?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Who did kill Gaston?"

"I give it up. Some person of good judgment. When I learn I will congratulate him."

"Mr. Lomond, are you aware that a murdered man lies before you? Do you know why I am here?"

"No, for I don't see any earthly use of you!" bluntly replied Ben.

"I will try to enlighten you," quickly answered Nathan, annoyed to an extreme. "I am looking for the murderer, and all things tell at such a time. Who killed him? You quarreled with him, and then threatened to do violence to him—"

"Yes, and I intended to do it, too!" exclaimed Lomond.

"Have you done it?"

"Why, you fool, don't you see somebody got ahead of me?"

"Where were you when he was murdered?"

"I don't know."

"Can you prove an *alibi*?"

"No, and I don't want to."

"You did not have anybody with you—"

"No. I was all alone, and might just as well have walked in here and killed Gaston as to let some other fellow get ahead of me. Yes, I missed my chance sorely. Why does luck misuse an honest man so?"

The patrolman touched his forehead and nodded to the detective. The pantomime was seen by Ben Lomond, who promptly retorted:

"You are a liar! I am as sane as you are."

He was sane, and Nathan believed it. Further than that he could not tell anything about Ben Lomond; the man puzzled him. He stood in silence, eying his singular acquaintance. Ben was burly and muscular, and his face was high colored and full of ragged curves and hard lines. The face of a man addicted to indulgence in temper, if not in crime, it surely was.

Jones presently moved uneasily, and Nathan stirred into activity.

"Mr. Lomond, did you kill Gaston?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you know who did?"

"No."

"You say you cannot prove an *alibi*?"

"I can't."

"Then I shall have to arrest you and take you to Police Headquarters."

"Do you really mean it?" demanded Lomond, calmly.

"Yes."

"Then you are a bigger fool than you look to be, and that is useless!" was the blunt retort.

Nathan was an old hand, but, for some reason, he flushed under this sharp answer.

"Prove your innocence—"

"I won't!" snapped Ben Lomond. "If you think it will amuse you, hustle me away to your lock-up. I don't care for any such rubbish. Now if it was among the Bushmen, I should be eaten inside four hours, unless I was spoiled in the cooking, and the Bushmen are a sort of cooks that rarely burn their meat. Lock me up? Why, Lord bless you! if you feel that way, go ahead. I said long ago that you were a fool. When did you get out of the asylum for weak-minded critters?"

Sarcasm flowed freely from Ben's lips, though what it all meant was not clear. He did not seem to be joking, and if he sneered it was only his usual way, and he was not unusually angry.

Nathan Short was the man who had been sent to have charge of the case, and when he arrived and learned about Ben Lomond's quarrel with the murdered man he had waited for him. Ben had come; he had added to suspicion by his manner, and the detective could not very well do otherwise than arrest him.

Accordingly, he was arrested and taken to a police building, and taken, too, without the least difficulty. He went without a word of remonstrance, and continued to indulge in his sneering remarks and uncomplimentary epithets.

When rid of him Nathan Short hastened away. He walked rapidly for a mile and then brought up at a modest looking house. He entered without delay and was soon in the presence of another man who greeted him with the question:

"Well?"

Strangely enough the man who asked a question so briefly was Lee Westervelt, the Clear Grit Sport. What followed seemed even stranger.

"I have made an arrest," replied Nathan.

"What! is the murderer found so soon?"

"I don't know. Suspicion points in two directions, and neither may be a correct clue."

"Who is pointed at?"

"First, an eccentric, coarse lodger in the house; second a charming young woman who is a city missionary."

"Meaning Elzora Ames. Have you learned more than the coroner reported?"

"Really, I have not. I arrested Ben Lomond because his manner and general conduct made it necessary; he had to be where we could find him. He admitted the quarrel with Gaston, and the threats."

"You did right to arrest him," replied Westervelt, quietly. "Nothing must escape our net. You have done perfectly right, I dare say, Mr. Short. Sit down and make your report in full."

CHAPTER VI.

GUILT IS CHARGED.

WHEN Elzora Ames left the house where Charles Gaston lay dead she had walked off with the manner of one who wishes to get out of sight as soon as possible, yet dares not hurry too much. It was a severe shock to her when she turned and saw Arad Frederickson beside her. Then came his lazily-spoken words:

"Pardon me, but will you delay long enough to let me compare notes with you on the murder?"

Elzora gazed at him in blank dismay.

"What—what do you mean?" she finally muttered.

"Are we not mutually interested in poor Gaston's untimely taking off?"

"It is sad."

"Very! I can see that you feel it deeply."

There was a sneer in Frederickson's manner, and her own demeanor grew worried and further uneasy.

"May I ask what you want, Mr. Frederickson?" she returned, with a feeble show of composure.

"You may. We are not in the presence of that odious coroner, and we can speak freely. You told your fiction to him well, Miss Ames."

"Fiction, sir?"

"So I said."

"What do you mean?"

"You assured him that your acquaint-

ance with Gaston was limited to trying to induce him to drop Jimmy Newdick from his list of jockeys."

Elzora had a mild face, but it was not without lines indicating latent firmness. To this last assertion she replied with a degree of defiance:

"Well, what of that?"

"It was not true," Frederickson bluntly answered.

"Sir?"

"Bear in mind that I was Gaston's partner. He and I were in constant association—"

"Has he dared to tell you anything?" warmly interrupted Elzora.

"No, he has told me nothing, but—"

Arad stopped short. He had been truthful and frank, and now he was sorry for it. He aspired to get a hold on this city missionary, and it suddenly occurred to him that he might possibly have made it strong by cunning procedure. When it was too late he wished he had declared that Gaston had confided in him.

Elzora had her own game to play, and to that end she now forced herself to smile.

"I asked you that to see if you would tell the truth," she added. "Mr. Gaston could not tell you anything, for there was nothing to tell."

"Oh! so you are crafty!" exclaimed Arad.

"Crafty?"

"Now that I have been fool enough to disavow direct knowledge from Gaston, you cunningly state that there was nothing to be told."

"That is true; there was nothing."

"Humph! We will— But why waste time on that? Miss Ames, you are not so ignorant of how Gaston died as you claim!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I know that Gaston has had some secret of yours in keeping in the past. He was not the sort of a man to go and give anybody away—he was the whitest man I ever knew—but I became possessed of the knowledge that he did have something about you that would have made you squirm if the world knew it."

"I object to this insulting and false statement!" declared Elzora.

"Wait! You came to Gaston once to beseech him not to betray you—I know that. He did not betray you, but you never felt safe with your secret in his keeping. What dark deed you had done I know not; I confess that freely."

"I had done none."

"When you stood over Gaston, this morning," pursued Frederickson, stubbornly, "I read much in your face. It was a bold move for you to come there so soon after his death, but you relied on your character as a missionary, and believed it safe. Did you?"—Arad paused, sneered, and finished his sentence with aggravation slowness—"did you come to see if you and your associates had made a complete success of killing Charles Gaston?"

"Sir, this is infamous!" declared Elzora.

"You tremble!"

"Who would not?"

"Conscience makes cowards of us all."

"Do you assert that I had knowledge of the slaying of Charles Gaston?"

"Just what I wish to convey."

"It is false, infamously false!"

"Murderers rarely confess."

"Mr. Frederickson, you do not know what you say."

With this reply Elzora burst into tears, but this did not touch her companion's heart. He surveyed her closely.

"A magnificent woman!" he thought.

"Did she have part in the killing of Gaston? Whether she did or not I will pretend to think she did, and try to work on her fears until I have her in my power. She pleases me, and I may decide that she is the woman I want to marry, if I find she did not do the deed. Possibly—well, I might even marry her if I found she was guilty!"

He let a few moments pass, and then, as her tears flowed less rapidly, softened his voice and added:

"I hope you will not think me cruel. I would not be that for the world, but I am all nervous and broken up over the death of my poor friend. Don't blame me if I seem to be unfeeling."

"At least you need not have charged me with murder."

"Please forgive me."

"You surely do not think it, sir."

"Miss Ames, let me be your friend. Those men who have just left, are suspicious. You need somebody to fight your battles; to advise and protect you. Now, tell me just what secret Gaston held over you, and I will work to your good. He kept the secret—why shouldn't I?"

"Tell you?"

"Yes."

"No, no; I would not do it."

"But I could then help you."

Elzora's eyes had cleared, and she looked at Frederickson closely. He had put on his most winning smile, or what he meant should be that, but she saw deeper than he intended she should. She saw enough so she instinctively retreated a step.

"No, no!" she repeated hurriedly.

"Would you reject a friend?"

"I have friends already—people of the mission with which I am connected—"

"Would you have them know of your past?"

She threw her head back with sudden decision.

"My past is blameless, sir, and I need not seek to hide it."

Arad bit his lip with vexation. His fancy for the girl was growing rapidly, and he did not feel like enduring delay. Then he recovered his composure somewhat. Plainly, he must go very slow in the matter.

"I take your word for all," he meekly answered. "Do not think I intended to charge willful misdemeanors to you; I only thought that the best of persons might be unfortunate, you see. I will not press the point, but if I ever can help you I will gladly."

"Thank you, but it will not be necessary. Now, I can linger no longer. Good-morning!"

She hastened away with abruptness which told that she did not want anything more said to her, and Frederickson allowed her to go. He watched her thoughtfully.

"She has a secret," he muttered, "and if I am patient, I can get control of her destiny. Fear is a potent lever."

He was still looking after her when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned with a quick motion, something like concern in his manner, and then suddenly laughed.

"Oh! is it you, Roger?" he exclaimed.

"Nobody else."

"You came up like a cat."

"Not so. A man don't need to be cat-like with anybody who is in a brown study. Arad, who was that damsel who has your heart safe?"

"Nonsense, Roger! Do you think Arad Frederickson would be so big a fool as to have a heart trouble?"

"I only know he fell into the bottomless pit of meditation when his charmer went away. Who is she, old man?"

"A friend of mine."

"I thought so. Let me guess her name. Say that it is Ames."

"What! do you know her?"

"Only that she has been with Charley Gaston in the past."

Frederickson seized Roger by the arm.

"Say, what do you know of her? What business had she with Gaston?"

"I merely know it was something about a love affair of hers. She was married, or nearly married, and Gaston knew something on that head which was of a nature to shake her nerves."

"What?"

"I don't know."

"Married, did you say? Then why is she still Miss Ames?"

Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"That don't count in modern times."

"Can you tell me nothing? Fact is, Roger, I have but just met her to have any talk, and I want to add to my knowledge."

"I cannot enlighten you, Arad. What I have told you I got by overhearing a part of her talk with Gaston. He might have made it warm for her, but you know what he was—a good-hearted man, and not inclined to worry anybody. He promised to keep her guilty secret. It was like the good old fellow, you know."

"Poor Gaston!"

"Don't feel so bad," replied Roger, with something like a sneer. "You and he have

quarreled over the management of Aztec Chief, and he threatened to horsewhip you—"

"Drop that, Roger!" hurriedly requested Arad.

"Your record is not perfect, old man," added Roger, tantalizingly.

"What of yours?" warmly retorted the horse-owner. "You used to be a book-maker. Are you one now? No. Why? Well, you are marked down as a welcher."

Roger winced perceptibly.

"You and I had better not call names," he confessed. "There was a time when Red Roger Peters stood high, but I was fool enough to make winter books on the Suburban, and I had to welch or go broke. Hang it! if I ever get back into the betting-ring I will never take a bet until the horses are so near the post that their fetlocks brush the dirt at the paddock gate."

"Never mind, Roger; let's have a drink and forget our sorrows."

"So we will," replied the welcher, "and then I want you to say if you really know who killed Charles Gaston."

"Ask the police. What I know I shall not tell."

CHAPTER VII.

DANGEROUS INTRUDERS.

THAT evening Elzora Ames sat in her room alone. It was a humble place, but one in keeping with the character under which she was known to the world. When she became a city missionary she eschewed all things frivolous and luxurious, and her room was as plain as the limits of comfort would allow.

It is an old saying that no woman devotes herself to work purely benevolent and self-sacrificing unless she does it to cover a heart-ache, and to retire with her disappointments from public view.

This remark had been made of Elzora when she became a missionary, but no one could tell just what her sorrow and her embitterment had been. They only knew that from a girl who was always as gay as the average of her sex she had suddenly become grave and sad, and had taken to missionary work.

In doing this she did not make any public or private renunciation of the world, and there was nothing to prevent her from forsaking her new life if she wished to, later on.

As a missionary she was, as far as outward appearance went, sedate and sweet of manner, but cheerful as a rule, but nobody came close enough to her inner life to know what it was.

This evening she read the newspaper with considerable interest, for there was one article of more than passing moment to her.

"The chief police mystery of the day," said the paper, "is what is popularly known as the 'live wire tragedy.' The death of Charles Gaston perplexes all outsiders, and, unless the police are keeping something back, they are equally at a loss to account for the known facts."

"It seems almost certain that Gaston retired for the night, yet he was a little later carried out, fully dressed, and laid on the live wire by unknown parties."

"Who were they? Had they visited him, and thus led him to dress himself? Why did they take so much risk as to convey him through the house when they might at any step have encountered persons who would have detected and exposed them? Why was he not left in the house? How did they know of the live wire?"

"These, and many other things perplex the seeker for light, and we know of no advance in the case. Gaston was not robbed of his money, or gold watch. He had no known enemy, but was popular with all. Why was he killed? Who killed him?"

There was more of speculation, but all went to show how much at sea the writer was. One thing, only, seemed certain, and that was that he was correct in saying that the live wire tragedy was the sensation of the hour.

Elzora gave no clue to her own opinion on the subject, but, when she had read the article over several times, she laid the paper aside with a sigh.

During the day she ignored self, as usual,

and had tramped the city in her missionary work until she was well tired. Now, she lay down on the bed without undressing, intending to remain there for an hour before retiring fully.

She did more; she fell asleep and remained thus while several hours passed on.

When she awoke it was not in an ordinary manner. Good nerves enabled her to avoid any betraying start, but she opened her eyes quickly and found that her vague feeling that something was wrong was well founded. By her bed stood a man, masked and grim of appearance, while a second person of the same sort was not far away.

Elzora's heart began a painful flight in its narrow limits, and she was too much alarmed to cry out. Two strange, masked men in her room! What did it mean?

He who stood near her was watching his companion, and the latter was engaged in rummaging in Elzora's trunk.

"Burglars!" thought the missionary.

The man by the trunk suddenly abandoned his task.

"I can't find nothin'," he growled.

"Look elsewhere," directed his comrade.

"Ain't I looked everywhere, already?"

"It may be under the carpet."

"Thunder! am I ter turn carpet-beater?"

"It may be useless."

"I should say that it would. Never knew nobody but a miser ter take a carpet ez his hidin'-place. It ain't— Say, the gal is awake!"

The speaker had turned his gaze, and the exclamation was the result. The man nearest to Elzora wheeled abruptly. The girl met his gaze. Almost instantly he held up his hand threateningly.

"Don't you dare to yell!" he cried, warningly.

Elzora tried to speak, but she did not succeed in commanding words.

"Just lie still," the intruder added, "or it will go hard with you. Do you understand?"

"What do you want?" faltered Elzora.

"Well, I want something of you—yes, I do."

"I have but little money—"

"And that little you can keep."

"Jewels—"

"We don't want."

"Then I am at a loss to know why you are rummaging my room."

"I reckon I can explain. I want a paper—a written document."

"From me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"It concerns you and—"

"Well?"

"To be plain, it concerns Charles Gaston!"

Elzora had been growing less frightened. She now grew more interested.

"I have no document which even relates distantly to Mr. Gaston."

"Come, come! None of that."

"It is true."

"Didn't he give you a paper which related to family history?"

"No."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh! come, now; don't act like that. We are not here to make a row if we can help it, or to harm you, but there is business on the bill-boards, and you must look things in the face. We happen to know it was you who killed Charles Gaston—"

"I?"

"Yes."

"It is false; I did nothing of the sort!" cried Elzora, with spirit.

"That's all right, girl; we don't care a rap. Gaston was no special friend of ours, and we won't make any trouble for you on that head. Don't be afraid. All we claim is that we are dead onto the facts, and now we want the paper Gaston gave you—not the night he was killed, but some months ago. You know it has family history in it."

"Who are you?" abruptly demanded Elzora.

"Call me Jack Sheppard."

"Why do you want the paper?"

"Now, see here!" broke in the second intruder, "this is just rot. You two will go on chinnin' all night, an' never get no nearer ter nothin'. Drop it, ef you want my help.

If I rummage fer the pape I want it ter be now. See?"

"Look elsewhere," suggested Jack Sheppard.

"Mebbe you want me ter tear up this whole blamed house, but I tell you," declared Man No. Two, his gaze fixed on Elzora, "that ef the pape is here, it ain't under no carpet nor floor. You hear me? Boss, the gal has it herself!"

"What?"

"She's got it about herself. How do I know? Wal, it's a woman's way ter make herself a desk, jewel case and patent safe, all in one; and then you kin read it in this gal's eyes an' face. She's got the pape on her, sure-pop!"

"Shoot me if I don't think you are right. Look, anyhow!"

Elzora had become thoroughly alarmed. Whether she had the particular document they craved, or not, she was disposed to resist such a search as they mentioned, and resist it to the end.

She sprung off from the bed on the side opposite to Jack, and then made a dash for the door, but Man No. Two was ahead of her. He barred the way, and her retreat was cut off.

"Catch her!" exclaimed Jack.

Both men advanced. Elzora was terribly frightened, but the courage which had enabled her to visit the worst parts of the city as a missionary did not desert her then.

She caught up a heavy paper-weight from the bureau and confronted them with determination.

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "Don't dare to come near me!"

They obeyed without knowing why. She continued to stand at bay, firm and impassive. Jack was speechless for awhile, but when he saw that she did not speak, he took it on himself to do so.

"Say, now, what are you up to? Do you think you can beat off us two?"

"I warn you not to come nearer to me."

"Why, your strength is nothing compared with ours. You are mad to think you can defy us."

"If I have strength it is more than that of muscle. I depend on a protecting Providence. I am only a woman, but I warn you not to lay a hand on me. Keep off!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT PROWLERS.

ELZORA's manner was impressive, but she had to deal with men who were not open to the influences of moral power. Brute strength might have influenced them; nothing else could.

"You make a pretty picture!" sneered he who had chosen the name of Jack Sheppard. "Pictures are not in our line, though. Surrender!"

"No!" declared the girl.

"Tackle her, Tommy!" ordered Jack.

"Here goes!"

Tommy moved a little, but Elzora did not intend to meet that attack and suffer defeat. She had seized the paper-weight because it was the thing nearest to her hand. Now, she improved her situation by catching up the paper cutter which was beside it.

"Stop!" she directed. "This weapon has an edge, and you will feel it if you dare it. I shall strike with all my force. Keep away!"

"Go on, Tommy!" urged Jack.

"I reckon I should make a better searcher than you would, fer I am a married man. You jest grapple her, Jack, an' then I will find the pape. See?"

"Coward!"

"Ef I be, you ain't, Jack. Jest go in."

Jack was not so eager as he wanted Tommy to be. He was not a coward, but he knew that the edged tool would be a bad thing to be struck with. He did not dare it.

"Now, see here, girl, what is the use of your acting so?" he went on, complainingly.

"If we see fit to be ugly you know you won't have any chance. Don't force us to act that way. We are in the house, and if it comes to a tight rub we shall have to look out for ourselves. If you give an alarm we shall show you no mercy. Don't force it on us. Have that paper we will, so give it up like a reasonable woman."

"I have no such paper."

"Nonsense!"

"If I had, I would not give it to you."

Jack was plainly at a loss what to do. He rubbed his chin reflectively and looked at Tommy. Tommy shook his own head as if he was without ideas. The clock on the mantel ticked on merrily, its music sounding strangely loud. It was a pause full of importance, chiefly because it gave Elzora time to think.

She felt that she must succumb to superior force sooner or later, and that something else was needed than her mere efforts.

She planned accordingly.

Delay did not help Jack, and he determined on bold action. He poised himself for a leap, resolved to dare the knife.

He bounded forward.

Elzora receded. Quickly she fell back, and her movement took her close to the open window. She tore some sort of a paper out of her bosom and, even as the eyes of the toughs glittered with anticipated triumph, took her next step.

"We have it!" cried Jack.

Swish!

The paper was flung from the window.

"Great Caesar!"

Jack stood aghast. In the very moment of anticipated triumph he had met with a severe check, and the coveted paper was gone from his reach—for that it was the desired paper he did not doubt.

Elzora stood with flushed cheeks, a look of victory on her face.

"What have you done?" almost shouted Tommy.

"Baffled you!"

"How dared you throw it away?" snapped Jack.

"How dared you come for it?"

"But you have cast it out into the street."

"Yes."

"It is lost to all of us."

"What is that to you? It is my paper."

"You have not saved it."

"And you have not secured it."

"Say," cried Tommy, "w'ot chumps we be ter stay here. The hour is late, an' only a few folks out. Ef we hustle we kin likely git it, after all. Why don't we go down an' see?"

"Down to the street!" cried Jack.

He set the example, and rushed madly to the door. He tore it open and hastened into the hall. The time of the night and the fact that they were house-breakers seemed to call for caution, but it was little heeded then. Their sole thought was to get out and secure the paper.

Elzora was no sooner left alone than she locked the door after them. Then she ran to the window and looked out.

"Safe!" she exclaimed.

Sure enough, the paper was to be seen a few feet below the window, a white spot gleaming in the semi-darkness. The level of the street was many feet below.

When Elzora took the desperate step of throwing the document out of the window she had not by any means reconciled herself to the idea of having it fall to the street. She remembered that painters had that day been at work on the house, and that the ladder they had used had been left suspended under her window in mid-air, as painters often leave their ladder.

She had taken the last resort of trying to drop the paper on the ladder, believing the intruders would not look out to see what had become of it, and the plan had worked well thus far.

But what would come next? The paper was three feet below her reach. She realized this, yet she reached out and held her hand well down.

"I can't get it!" she exclaimed. "What shall I do? They will be out in the street in a moment."

Again she reached for it, for hope died hard.

"Oh! if I could only get it!"

A strong puff of wind swept down the block.

"The paper will blow away!"

The thought gave her a nervous start, and she for the third time made the utterly futile effort to grasp the document. The wind died out, however, and that fear was for the instant lessened, but just then the house-breakers rushed out into the street.

Elzora shrunk back somewhat, standing where she could see but not be visible to Jack and his ally. The great question was, how much of the truth would they learn?

It occurred to her that if she could go to the lower floor, she would have an opportunity to fasten the house so they could not re-enter, but she dared not take the risk.

Jack and Tommy did not look upward, but hurriedly scanned the sidewalk for the desired article.

"Where is it?" Elzora heard Jack ask.

"Et must be near."

"I don't see it."

"Mebbe it fluttered inter the basement."

"Look there!"

Tommy went into the area and began to peer into the corners there.

"Don't see it nowhere," he grumbled.

"Look under the stoop."

The second burglar took hold of the rods of the gate and tried to obey.

"Is it there?" demanded Jack.

"Don't see nothin' but darkness."

"Bah! your eyes are poor!"

Jack hastened to his comrade's side and tried to excel him, but the only result was the confession:

"It is dark there."

"Only a cat kin see."

"Can't we open the gate?"

They tried and failed.

"Dang it! we shall have ter git some dynamite!" growled Tommy.

"We'll get in here somehow. But hold on! It's dark in there, but wouldn't a white paper of that size show, anyhow, dark or no dark?"

"I b'lieve et would, old man."

"We are on the wrong track, and just wasting time here. Hang it! where can that thing have gone?"

"There's a good bit of wind. Hasn't it blown down the block?"

"Maybe, and then, again, it might have lodged on the window-sill, somewhere above."

The last words gave Elzora a shock, and she saw them step away from the gate and look up.

"Hullo! what's that jigger?" asked Tommy.

"A painter's ladder."

"Sure, an' right under the gal's winder."

"By Jovel it may have landed there!"

Both men secured the best position and looked up more earnestly.

"I'll bet a dollar it's there!" declared Jack.

"I dunno. Notice that wind. Wouldn't it have blown the paper off down the block?"

"Possibly, but the wind blows in puffs. The document is just as likely to have lodged squarely on the ladder."

Elzora began to be very nervous again. The paper was still where Jack intimated, but it did not lie still. Now and then a strong puff of wind made it tremble and give every sign of blowing completely off the frail support. If it did, it would naturally fall into the hands of her foes, she thought. It was a painful situation to her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATE OF THE PAPER.

THE housebreakers tried to gain a position where they could settle the question of whether the lost paper was on the ladder, but they did not succeed.

"Tommy," finally announced the leader, "there's only one way to learn how this is."

"How?"

"We've got to go back into the girl's room."

"Whew! She may have made things warm fer us afore now."

"Do you know any other way?"

"No."

"Then let's go in and take the chances."

"Lead on!"

Jack started for the door, and Tommy followed after. They were a bold pair, to say the least, for the danger of being heard by somebody in the house besides Elzora was certainly great, but they disregarded it.

Elzora beheld their new move with fresh apprehension. She fastened her door, it is true, but their previous success in getting into the place gave her a profound respect

for their abilities in that line. Would they succeed in entering her room and securing the document?

"Oh! I wish I could get it!"

Once more she reached down, but her arm had not grown in length, and the attempt was as fruitless as before.

Again came a puff of wind, this time stronger than before.

"The paper!"

Elzora whispered the words in sudden apprehension. The precious document had reared on end like a fractious horse at the starter's post, and evinced a desire to walk. Gradually, however, it settled, and all seemed to be well when a second sweep of wind, no longer a mere puff, rushed down the block. It seized the paper and whisked it off from the ladder with one stroke.

"Oh!" gasped Elzora.

There was good cause for the exclamation. The document was gone—not one foot nor fifty, merely, but borne on the wings of the wind, it was sailing through mid-air. Straight down the block, keeping nearly the same height above the sidewalk, it went on its way, erratic but sure as a bird.

"Gone, gone!" muttered the girl, in a panic.

She no longer thought of her persecutors, but gave all heed to the lost article. Breathlessly she watched its flight.

Presently the propelling power grew weak and it bade fair to settle wholly, but just when this seemed assured, another strong, wayward current of air followed the first and the flight became a rout.

Upward soared the paper—up to the tops of the houses, and then still higher. It was a true aerial traveler, and flirting with the wind well above the highest building.

Bird-like it whirled on, showing no disposition to drop—and then disappeared from sight.

"Lost!"

Elzora burst into tears as she uttered the word. Her temporary triumph had ended in defeat, and the paper was gone—where? Where would it alight? Into whose hands would it fall? Would its contents soon be known to all the city?

"Misfortune follows me like a bloodhound!" she sobbed. "Is my life of misery and self-sacrifice to end thus?"

The knob of the door was touched and an effort made to turn it. Jack and his companion were there. This did not at first interest her, so great did the latest misfortune seem, but when she heard a jimmy or some other article rattle in the lock she aroused.

If the paper was gone it was no reason why she should be indifferent to her personal safety.

She hurried to the door.

"Go away!" she commanded, in a very audible voice. "If you do not go I will scream for help."

The sounds ceased, but, instead, she could hear a whispered conference. She took courage.

"Go at once!" she added. "I will surely scream if you delay."

"Girl," answered a voice in the hall, "keep still and we will give it up. We will go now."

Elzora heard no more, but a visit to the window enabled her to see the housebreakers come out. Perhaps they had abandoned all thought of the ladder, for they paused only to give it a casual glance and then moved off down the block, searching in each area for the lost paper.

As for Elzora, she hurried down to the door and relocked it. Her personal danger was over, but she could feel no triumph while the fate of the paper was unknown.

"Somebody will find it; it may ruin me!" she murmured.

And what had become of the paper?

Shortly after it took its flight a man was passing through the street which led at right angles with that on which Elzora lived. He was striding along rapidly, his feet on the sidewalk but not accompanied by his thoughts. The latter were far away, but he came down to present time when a white object fluttered down from the upper air and dropped at his feet.

Wind-blown papers were not uncommon, but this one had such a clean appearance, and was so neatly folded, that he paused and picked it up. He glanced at the windows

near, but saw nobody looking out to reclaim it.

Obedying an impulse, he thrust it in his pocket and went his way.

This man was Lee Westervelt, the Clear Grit Sport.

He pursued his course, walking with the light step and airy manner which were a part of his life as a sport, and making rather a pleasant appearance, with his immaculate dress and clean general aspect.

He finally paused before a house, applied a key, entered and went to a room on the second floor. It was not untenanted, for Nathan Short, the detective, sat by the table, reading a newspaper.

"Back again?" he spoke.

"Yes, Nathan," the Sport gravely replied, "your eyes do not deceive you."

"Any news?"

"You are the one to get news. Are you not a detective? While I—of course I know nothing of such things."

Nathan laughed.

"You play in luck to have outsiders think so. Five years you have been in harness, and dozens of men you have sent to prison; yet nobody but myself outside of the police superintendent's office knows your true character."

"If law-breakers did, they would regard me as the Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of their lives."

"That's just what you are. You figure as a mere sport, and do all that is possible to carry out your assumed character. You play the races, and go the pace generally. Yet, you are a full-fledged detective, and the most dangerous man in New York, today, to law-breakers."

"Thanks to you, Nathan. I plan; you act."

"I furnish the muscle; you, the brains."

"Nonsense, Nathan! You have a long head on your shoulders. If you had not you would do as my aid. Never mind this. As a detective pair we are winners, and that is enough. Anything new on the live wire tragedy?"

"No."

"It will be slow, I reckon."

"Unless we quickly decide who killed Gaston. Was it Elzora Ames and her unknown allies, or surly Ben Lomond?"

"Nathan?"

"Yes."

"I am going to have Ben released."

"Why?"

"If innocent, we do not want him shut up. If guilty, he will help us more at liberty than in confinement. He has stubbornness galore and will not confess, but if we let him go free, he is likely to betray himself by some error of judgment on his part."

"You may be right."

"Anyhow, I shall ask the superintendent to release him."

"That means he will be free soon. Your request will not be refused. I never knew Headquarters to refuse you."

"That's because I ask nothing foolish—if I can help it."

The Sport Detective's hand wandered to his pocket to see if he had a cigar. The motion brought him in contact with the document he had lately picked up in the street. He pulled it out and unfolded it. One glance, and then he exclaimed:

"What's this?"

"Well, you ought to know."

"A paper signed with Charles Gaston's name."

"I don't suppose it blew into your pocket."

"You don't know how near you have come to calling the turn, Nathan."

Westervelt forgot his companion and began to read. Nathan did not know the history of the paper, so his interest was rather languid. He waited patiently until Lee was done. Then the document was flung at him.

"Read that!" the Sport directed.

And Nathan read as follows:

"MISS AMES:—I did not keep my engagement with you because I saw no need of seeing you; I do not take the grounds that you do in the case. Unless there is something more decisive I prefer to keep out of this dirty muddle. You would have done well to do the same, Miss Ames."

"As I have told you personally, I cannot help you in your trouble. If, as you say, you are innocent of all wrong intentions, I am sorry for you, but this has not been proved. You are mixed up in an unsavory mess, and you will have to abide by it."

"In regard to the man in the case, I want to say that I have no use for him. Men may possibly get into such scandalous situations by accident, but they are a mighty sight more likely to do it by design. There is about one chance in a thousand that the man in this case is as innocent as an angel. Study the opposite nine hundred and ninety-nine chances, and you will see what I think of him."

"The other woman—ah! the other woman! One woman makes a heaven; two women make—well, I won't say what I mean, for I am a blunt old horseman and I can't be very polite."

"Miss Ames, I advise you to shake the whole business. Clean the mud off of your own skirts, and don't seek to flirt any of it onto a sister woman's. Don't let us have any violence in this matter."

"Violence? Well, I don't know what you might do to the other woman—or to me—but threats will not avail anything to make me help anybody. Miss Ames, don't try to kill me off, for I am an old campaigner. Hold in your wrath. 'Thou shalt not kill!' In conclusion, don't try to see me again; I will have no more of this wretched business. Let this be decisive."

"CHARLES GASTON."

Nathan finished reading, and looked up.

"Well, this is interesting!" he commented.

"Enough so to make us warm to our work," agreed Lee. "We have something to work on now, and it points to the text. Who killed Gaston?"

CHAPTER X.

BEN LOMOND.

LATE in the following day Ben Lomond reappeared at Jones's hotel. He walked into the house with an air as cool as if he had merely been away on business for a day or two, but his entrance caused Mr. Jones to stare with wide-open eyes.

"Hallo!" he gasped, "how is this?"

"How is what?" asked Lomond, calmly.

"Are you—are you out?"

"Judge for yourself."

"Have they released you?"

"Well, it isn't a case of escape; I can assure you of that."

"What did they say?"

"No evidence."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jones, and then he rallied to the occasion. He had been influenced by the arrest of his eccentric lodger, and had found food for suspicion in all of Ben Lomond's peculiarities, but with Ben released by the police it was a very different matter.

"Glad to see you back, old man!" he exclaimed. "I knew you were innocent, and would come out all right. The papers have been filled with wild articles, condemning you, and—"

"Yes, I saw them. I happen to be a comparative stranger and alone, and that is proof enough to hang any man, in the estimation of the youthful lambs who report things for the newspapers. Bah! those fools will know more when they get a few more gray hairs in their heads—and more gray matter in their brain cavities!"

"You are welcome back, anyhow. Your old room is all ready for you. Have the police got clue to the real slayer?"

"I hope not!" snapped Ben Lomond.

"You do? Why?"

"It was a good job to do away with Gaston. Why should anybody be hanged for it? A good job!"

"Come, come, now; don't say that. If anybody but me should hear you it might go hard with you; they might think you really did have hand in killing Gaston. You ain't proved innocent yet, you know."

"The police can't do that."

"What?"

"Prove me innocent. I defy them to do it!"

Ben Lomond spoke with an air of triumph, and Jones shook his head.

"You speak just as if you didn't want them to prove you innocent."

"I don't care a rap whether they do or not, but this much is sure—they can't do it. I may be guilty for all they know. Whose business is it if I am guilty? Nobody's, but my own."

The speaker's little eyes glittered as if he felt undying enmity for everybody who thought he might be innocent, and Jones gave up the discussion. He did not know how to converse with a man who took pride in not having been cleared of an atrocious charge.

Ben Lomond went to his room, and Jones shook his head again.

"A mighty queer duck! I never saw another so queer except a crazy man; but one thing is sure—Ben Lomond is as sane as I am. It's just his confounded eccentricity that makes him want to be thought a doubtful character—though I am not sure but he is that. Yes, he may be the one who murdered Charles Gaston."

Mr. Jones was a good deal unnerved by the tragedy which had taken place in his house, and he now shook his head again in a way which had grown upon him.

If Ben Lomond was under suspicion of murder it did not affect him to the extent of making him a recluse. He kept his room for but a short time, and then appeared among the other lodgers, most of whom were men who did not go to business.

Ben had never been a favorite in the house, but notoriety makes a man popular in one way, and everybody wanted to talk with Ben. They were not disappointed; he came in among them, and his tongue wagged almost ceaselessly.

As he had talked to Jones so he talked to all, and the general wonder was that he had been permitted to go free. Many a man had been kept in confinement for weeks for less suggestive remarks than those that Ben reeled off so freely.

Time and again he avowed that it was a good thing Gaston was dead, and, instead of asserting his innocence, he boasted that the police could not prove him innocent.

Mr. Lomond was the puzzle of the day, but he made no friends by his talk, and it was the universal remark that, if he was not guilty, the hearers were no judges on such points.

It was not until after dark that Lomond ceased to be the center of the gossiping circle. Then he went out of the house without comment, and they lost sight of him.

It was suggestive that when he had gone half a block, a man came out of some place and fell quietly in behind him. It was more suggestive that this man was Lee Westervelt, and further impressive grew the situation when it was to be seen that he followed wherever Ben Lomond went. Ben did not observe this; he evidently cared nothing for possible pursuit, for he did not once look around.

The Clear Grit Sport had undertaken a task of some time, and he was kept on the move for many blocks before Ben's intentions became known to the pursuer.

Finally Lee muttered, as Ben turned a corner:

"Odd! Elzora Ames lives on this block!"

Yet further went Ben, and then he paused and rung a bell.

"The mystery grows!" muttered Lee. "It is the house, too, where Miss Ames boards."

A servant came to the door, and Ben quickly disappeared inside. The pursuit was over for a time, but the detective felt that he had been well repaid.

"I told the superintendent," he thought, "that Ben was a man who would help more to clear up the secret if he was at liberty than if he was in prison. Why has he come to see Elzora?—if that is his object."

Whenever Lee or his aid, Nathan Short, did any work in the line of their profession the former's knowledge of small details was clear and full as far as possible. Now, however he gained the information, he knew the location of Elzora's room, and he managed to secure a good position across the street where he could see the windows plainly.

Presently he saw Ben Lomond in the room, but the view was but brief. He also saw Miss Ames set a chair for the caller, and then both became invisible.

"I would give a big sum to hear and see all that goes on there," mused the detective. "It is remarkable, anyhow, that the two suspects of the case have come together thus. Were they partners in killing Charles Gaston?"

A rash man would have decided fully that this idea was correct, but Lee Westervelt proposed to know what he was doing before making a rash decision.

For an hour he was kept standing where he was. This, in his opinion, proved that the visit was not of ordinary nature, but that was all he could draw from it positively.

Finally Ben Lomond came out.

Lee could see his face well enough to note its expression, and he could see nothing in it to indicate unusual emotion. The late visitor was perfectly calm.

He walked away quietly!

The hour was so late that the streets were by no means well filled, and Lee knew this would render his task more difficult, but he fell in behind Ben to continue his pursuit. He saw Ben reach the corner, and then the quietude of the scene vanished suddenly.

There was a sound of unusual kind, and when the Clear Grit Sport fixed his gaze more closely he saw Ben in a struggle with two other men. They had leaped upon him roughly, and were giving him blow after blow.

"An assault!" exclaimed Lee. "What is up?"

To him it seemed like an attempt at robbery, but he did not see what there was in Ben Lomond to invite footpads.

"Those fellows are hard fighters!" added the detective. "It goes badly with Ben. I'll take a hand in the game."

He ran forward, but if he imagined that Ben was going to succumb to two men he made a great mistake. The assaulted person had been taken by surprise, and he did give ground for a while, but only briefly. Recovering himself he flew at his enemies like a tiger, and one of them was promptly bowled over with a swinging blow. Then he leaped at the other and rained blow after blow upon him.

Lee had been making commendable time, but when he arrived it was only to see the end of the fight.

The fallen man was up, mildly willing to continue, but, just then, his comrade concluded he had enough of it. He turned and fled with long steps, and the second man, seeing Lee, imitated his ally's example without delay.

The two went tearing off.

The detective paused.

"Well, you seem to have settled it all," he remarked, not without admiration for Ben's valor.

"All what?" growled Ben.

"The fight."

"Is that what you call it?"

"From the way that arms and legs flew, I do call it just that."

"Those fellows know nothing about fighting. One African Bushman would get away with a score of them."

"Who were they?"

"Don't know."

"Did they try to rob you?"

"No."

"Then they must have been enemies of yours?"

"Think so?" returned Ben, a grim smile lighting up his usually set face. Well, if that is it I am sorry they did not delay a bit. I really would have enjoyed a further seance with them."

"I was about to help you."

"Shows your good will, but, Lord! it wasn't at all necessary; I could easily dispose of a dozen like them."

"What's this?"

Lee stooped and picked up an envelope from the sidewalk.

"Did you drop it?" he added.

"No."

"Then they must."

"Very likely. There is nothing in the envelope, but you can have what there is of it. There is a name on the envelope."

There was a name, as Lee had plainly seen. The envelope had been through the New York post-office in due form, and had, it seemed, reached its destination. The name on the envelope was Charles Gaston.

Keenly Lee watched as Ben took it. The

latter read the few words of writing, and then his brows contracted. He looked at Gaston's name intently.

"Well, that is queer!" he exclaimed presently.

"Why?"

Ben lifted his gaze to his companion's face. "Because murder may lurk behind this envelope!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE RACE-TRACK DECOYS.

WESTERVELT grew suddenly interested

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Look at me," requested Ben Lomond.

"I am looking."

"Then you see a man who has had a world of experience. Why, sir, I have lived right with the Bushmen of Africa, and am really an adopted son of that noble race—"

"Cannibals, I believe."

"Yes."

"Proceed!"

Ben did not seem to see anything unusual in the suggestion of the last few words, and he did proceed.

"Such a man am I; yet, when I lately came to New York, I was accused of murder."

"Is it possible? Of course it was unjustly."

"As to that, the police have not yet succeeded in proving me innocent, and I defy them to do it."

"You mean guilty—"

"I mean that I defy them to prove me innocent! Well, the man I am accused of killing was Charles Gaston—same name you see on this envelope. What I want to know is, why did these fellows who carry an envelope directed to Gaston—why did they attack me?"

"Doubtless, they were the real criminals."

"I tell you I am not yet proved innocent. Don't talk of other possible criminals until I am cleared, and that will be a hard thing to do. But this envelope—well, it perplexes me."

"Are you sure you did not have it yourself, and drop it?"

"Yes."

Lee was not so sure of it. The presence of the envelope was mysterious unless it was accounted for as he had insinuated. Despite Ben's denial he regarded it as far more likely that it had been dropped by Ben than by the assailants. If so, how had he come by it? If it had not been his, who were the assailants who carried such an envelope?

"I'll keep it!"

With this abrupt addition Lomond stowed it away in his pocket. Then he pulled out a cigar.

"You seem to be a good fellow," he pursued. "Smoke, when you feel like it."

With these words he wheeled and walked off, leaving Lee alone. The latter did not recover from the surprise of this sudden breaking away in time to say more to Ben if he had wished to do so. He was not sure he had more to say, so he allowed Ben to progress alone, but he did not lose sight of him until the door of Jones's hotel closed behind him.

Then the detective started for his own home.

"What about that envelope?" he wondered. "Which party dropped it? Looks suspicious, and I must say the finger of evidence points more to Benjamin than the strangers. That fellow perplexes me. With his rough build, brusque manners and other things—including his probable lies about the Bushmen—he is a novelty."

The detective's mind went to Elzora Ames.

"What was Ben's errand there?" he pursued. "It is most impressive that the two suspects in the murder case should hold meeting thus. What had they to say to each other?"

It was a natural inquiry, but the answer did not suggest itself. Lee Westervelt went to bed no wiser on the subject.

The next day both he and Nathan Short were occupied with their latest case until noon. Then the Clear Grit Sport donned his most striking suit of clothes and took a train out of town. When he paused it was at the Morris Park racing course.

He was no stranger to the place, and many of the frequenters of the track knew him

well. As they did not know him as a detective, he had no ban upon him with those who liked races better than detectives.

He was not early, and when he reached the inclosure he found the betting ring crowded with men who wanted to risk their money.

The opening event was a sweepstakes for two-year-olds, five furlongs, selling, and as none of the stars which the new season had developed were entered, Lee had no intention of betting. Others were not so conservative, and money fell with considerable freedom, the talent having backed Utica down to seven-five, with Nanki Pooh second choice, and Cesarion and Mosquito not far behind.

While he was observing the changing figures on the boards two men approached so close that their words floated to the detective's ears.

"This is all a hurly-burly to me," observed one, doubtfully. "I think I will keep out of this race."

"Don't do it!" replied the second man. "Just you take Mosquito, and go in strong. See! Penn is to ride him, and that boy knows his business. Will you go in as a plunger or a piker?"

"Hanged if I know what you mean?"

"A plunger is a heavy bettor, while a piker is one who bets such dribbles as two or three dollars."

"I don't want to risk too much."

"Well, put five dollars on Mosquito. He stands fifteen-one to win and six-one for the 'place.' Play him to win, and your five will bring you fifteen times five. That's a tidy sum."

"Suppose it is lost?"

"Then you can make it up on the next event. My choice for the second event is Kinglet. He is in at an impost of one hundred and fourteen, but with Griffin up he should win."

"I don't like to risk anything on this opening event. You say that the horses are practically untried ones—"

"They are not world-beaters, and maybe you would do well to skip them and go in on Kinglet, for the second. I shall play Mosquito, but I am not sure enough to urge you. Suppose you play only good things—say Kinglet for the second, Gutta Percha for the third, Domino for the fourth, and so on."

"I think I will do that."

Lee Westervelt had listened to this talk, and he had done more. He had turned and looked at the men. One of them was Isaac Bartley, the pilot, while the other—

"Sol!" thought the detective, "Mr. Roger Peters, the welcher, is around. Well, he is a pretty case to engineer a beginner in playing the races."

There was both sarcasm and suspicion in Lee's manner. There was a time when he, Red Roger, was a bookmaker, and had a fairly good standing, but when he was hit hard in a big race he "welched," and had since been an outcast from the bookmakers' company.

Lee had a very poor opinion of him.

The bugle sounded for the first race and the detective went out to join the rail-birds and see the contest from the best possible point of view. He stood not far from Bartley and Red Roger, and was as much interested in them as in the race.

The welcher's pick, Mosquito, did not win. Nanki Pooh went to the front at the start, and was never once headed, though the finish was a warm one when Cesarion's rush was stalled off. Mosquito was third.

Back to the ring went the crowd, and Lee saw Isaac bet on Kinglet under Red Roger's guidance. It was a wise choice, but Lee began to grow suspicious. He did not know what degree of friendship might exist between the two men, but he could not believe Roger was the man to give disinterested advice to anybody.

"Is it a game to pluck Isaac?" wondered the detective.

Their bets being up the welcher spoke to his pupil.

"Do you stay here and watch the figures on the boards," he directed. "Note the changes as well as you can, so as to tell me of the fluctuations when I return."

"Very well," replied the pupil.

Roger left the ring, and Lee concluded to see where he went. It soon became clear

that the welcher had some definite object in view, for he lost no time in getting into the grand stand. There he quickly found and accosted a woman.

Lee had not frequented the race-track so many years without knowing many of the other frequenters by sight, if not more intimately, and now he murmured:

"Roena Rose!"

Roger's present companion was young and handsome. She was rather above the medium height, and was of dashing appearance. Brilliant colors made her a sort of bird of paradise, and to those who liked her kind would have been attractive—more, Lee knew she was attractive.

Day by day he had seen her at the races, and there were always admirers galore for her if she wanted.

She did not come there with any cold-blooded motive, for there were but few of the opposite sex who played any more steadily and daring than Roena Rose.

A veritable race track gambler, she made more money than she lost, and that was saying a good deal for her judgment, when it was known that she was a regular attendant.

"Ah! she and the welcher meet as they were bosom friends!" commented Lee, quietly. "She was waiting for him, I reckon."

However the last surmise might be, Roger had something to say to her. He bent his head close to hers, and proceeded to talk with rapidity and at considerable length. She listened attentively.

"Why don't Roger bring his pupil up to see his chum?" wondered Lee, with a sarcastic smile. "She would be a good teacher to a reckless man—good for her own pocket-book."

The chance association of ideas led to another thought.

"I wonder if Roger is as eager to get dollars as she is? Why does he leave Isaac and come direct to Roena? It would not be the strangest thing in the world if this was a plot to bleed Isaac. Was he decoyed here to be bled?"

There was no way to settle the point then, but the detective continued to watch the pair. It was not many minutes before another familiar figure appeared on the scene. A man approached, whispered to the welcher, and then moved quietly away.

"Tommy Meehan, the tout!" muttered Lee. "Well, well, this is a collection of fine birds!"

The speaker's gaze followed Tommy, and thus it was that he noticed something more.

"Ah! Isaac has grown tired of the betting-ring."

Bartley was standing in front of the grand stand. He had paused and was looking around with the air of one new to his surroundings. He scanned the rows of faces in the stand, and then looked at the race-track. The posts where the starters' names were run up interested him, too, though he did not seem to know what it was, and he turned from the obscure things to the stand again.

Even to the initiated the stand is always a scene of interest. Its long sweep and many rows of seats, with the brightness and color given it by the costumes of the female bettors make it like an oasis in mid-desert. This particular stand proved an attraction to Isaac, and he mounted the steps.

"This grows worth seeing," murmured Lee. "If Isaac keeps on he will run plump into Roger and Roena. What will happen then?"

CHAPTER XII.

A VICIOUS FEMALE SPORT.

ISAAC did keep on. Looking everywhere in a general way, and nowhere in particular, he walked forward, surveying the people with deep interest. They were men and women like, and yet unlike, those he had seen elsewhere, but they had the novelty of gamblers, and some of them were of such marked characteristics that he had something new to feed his eyes on.

"He is beside his mates!" thought Lee.

It was true. Isaac had advanced close to the gamblers, and still he remained as unconscious as they were. Would he pass without anybody being the wiser?

Suddenly he let his roving gaze rest nearer to himself—it fell upon Roena. He stopped short.

Then some sort of an exclamation fell from his lips.

Roena looked up quickly. Her gaze met Isaac's.

"By Jove!" thought Lee, "they are no strangers!"

Evidently they were not. Roena had been bound up in other things, but all grew small then. She stared hard at Bartley, and the two had a war of glances on.

The welcher could not be oblivious to all this; he looked up as suddenly as Roena had done. He saw his pupil.

Red Roger was a man of coolness ordinarily, but he did not show it then. He seemed to lack words, and there was silence between the trio. Isaac was surprised, and the others appeared dismayed. The pilot was the first to recover his wits.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"What does what mean?" weakly returned Roger.

"Who are you talking with?"

"A—a lady," muttered the welcher.

"Miss Connor, let me introduce you to—"

"Stop!" ordered Isaac, in a hard voice.

"No lies now. Am I blind? Peters, you are a new acquaintance to me, but I want this explained. Why are you with this woman?"

"Hasn't he a right to be here?" cried Roena, intemperately.

"Wait, wait!" directed Roger, hurriedly.

"You see, Bartley, she is one of my clients."

"I believe you lie!" bluntly retorted the pilot.

"Sir?"

"Chance does a good many things, but so does design. So you wanted me to stay in the betting ring? No wonder, for a scene of rare interest was going on here. I came after you, and this is what I find."

"You find—"

The female sport began to speak warmly, but Lee saw Roger pinch her secretly and shut off the answer.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Roger then asserted, "but this is all right. This lady is one of my clients."

"Then I don't want to be one."

Isaac started to turn, but the welcher caught him by the coat.

"Hold on!" he urged. "Don't let us have any trouble, Bartley. If you know this lady I am not aware of the fact—"

"That is true," added Roena.

"You both lie!" exclaimed Isaac.

Roena's eyes flashed.

"What's that?" she cried.

"I am dead on to your game."

"What game?"

"You have tried to get me in your power."

"Bah!" retorted the female better.

"I thought it was queer that Peters should want to help me, and that he took so much interest in me, a stranger. I see the object now; he was a decoy from you, woman."

"I tell you no!"

"And I tell you that you lie!" hotly cried the pilot.

Roena was a very angry woman. She flashed a swift glance around. Loud talk was not uncommon in the circle they were in, and this together with the fact that the horses were then out for the second race, prevented any great amount of attention from being centered on the trio. Some of their immediate neighbors knew they were in a quarrel, but people usually mind their own business at the race-track.

Seeing the situation the female sport suddenly bent toward the speaker and hissed:

"Say that to me again, Ike Bartley, and I will shoot your head off. See?"

"Hush, hush!" urged the welcher.

"I will!" she repeated. "I have a gun in my pocket, and I know how to use it. Mind you, Ike, or you will get the lead."

"You show your true character now."

"Call it what you will. I mean business. Mark it down."

Lee saw that Roger was decidedly upset by the turn of affairs, and the welcher made another effort to delude his intended victim. Isaac cut him short.

"It won't go. I know you now as a decoy for this woman and I am done with you. What new scheme she has I don't know, but it has failed."

Roena caught Lee's arm.

"You have made a mistake to insult me in this stand," he declared, passionately.

"I am among my friends, and you have tried to humiliate me—"

"What have you done to me in the past?"

"Sought my rights."

"You have persecuted me, and—and—"

"And the sweet-faced cherub you love?" sneered Roena.

"Silence! Do not mention her honored name here!" sternly commanded Isaac.

"Oh! so it is honored, is it? Since when? If Charles Gaston's lips were not closed a strange story might be told. His lips are still. Who stifled them? Yes, that is what I want to know. Gaston was my friend, and he could have ruined you and your meek missionary love if he had spoken out. Who stopped his power of speech?"

Roena had given way wholly to her feelings, and Roger was plainly alarmed.

"Hush, hush!" he directed.

"I will not 'hush,'" was the angry retort.

"I know who had cause to put Gaston out of the way, and I believe I know who did it. If the saintly missionary did not do the job alone she knew where to find an ally. There he is!"

She pointed to Isaac, and the fierce accusation was not thrown away. Isaac changed color, and appeared to be confused and worried. All this Lee Westervelt noticed.

"Is he moved by innocence or guilt?" thought the detective.

If Isaac was troubled, Roger was more agitated. He looked around in fear, but most of the people were looking at the starting point where the horses were gathered for the race.

"You want to be a little careful," replied the pilot in a thick voice. "You have made a grave accusation—"

"Nothing but murder."

"But to the innocent—"

"That does not mean you or the saint-like missionary."

"I will not have you insult her!" exclaimed Isaac, angrily.

"Guilt defends guilt. The infamy which hovers around you and her may well make you one in thought and purpose. A black past you and she have together—"

"You lie!" hotly cried Isaac.

In an instant a revolver flashed in Roena's hand.

"I will teach you to insult me!" she hissed.

"Take that!"

The hammer had been drawn back, and "that" meant a good deal, but Roger seized the weapon from her hold, and thrust it into his own pocket.

"We have had enough of this," the welcher exclaimed. "I know your grounds for thinking as you do, Roena—"

"Oh! so you do know!" interrupted the pilot. "Your plot is betrayed in part, and you need not pretend innocence any longer. You, Peters, are the ally of this woman, and I was brought here to be fleeced. It has not worked, and you can fool me no longer. The truth is out."

"Smash him, Roger!" was the very choicely worded request of the female sport.

But the welcher looked around in a worried way. He had a temper, himself, but he knew this was not the time to indulge it. Trouble on the grounds would result in his shady reputation being made worse, and he would be ruled off as a better, as he already was as a bookmaker.

Owing to the greater excitement their little show of war had received next to no attention, and he determined to stop everything further.

"Drop all this!" he ordered. "We three were not made to stand here together, as we do not appear to agree. How shall we break up? Bartley, I will go to the rail with you—"

"No, you will not; I'll go alone."

Isaac answered stiffly, and then turned and walked out of the grand stand. Straight forward he advanced until he had found position among the rear guard of the rail birds.

Lee Westervelt, standing with an air of innocent ease, and apparently surveying the track and horses, had heard all this. He did not move now, and he hoped to get more from the couple who remained, but he was defeated.

The welcher whispered to Roena, and then left the grand stand and went toward where Isaac stood.

Lee followed after, and kept both men in sight. Just then the prize attraction, however, was the race, which was fully on. Blitzen and Count had gone to the front as peacemakers, with the gallant old timer, Judge Morrow, close after. Kinglet was trailing with Herald, but the talent, who had plunged on Kinglet, did not lose their faith. Griffin was handling the favorite well, and as the jockey had already pulled off one race, it seemed to be his day. The only question was, would it prove to be Kinglet's day, also?

It was a good race thus far, and the spectators felt all the thrill which fires the blood on such occasions. The horses were rushing along madly, and every eye marked their flight with zest.

The stretch was reached—the decisive point where horses win or "die away," and then Griffin showed what Kinglet could do. The favorite passed his field like a shot, and came thundering down toward the judges' stand.

It was soon all over. Blitzen, Count and Judge Morrow fell far back, and even Herald was four lengths behind the winner when Kinglet bounded in a money taker, with four lengths between himself and his nearest competitor, the race of a mile and a sixteenth having been gone in 1:47, fast time for the distance.

Red Roger turned his gaze upon Isaac. The pilot had won by betting according to his advice, and he showed some disposition to make the fact an excuse for trying to win back lost favor.

He finally shook his head and stood still.

"He don't quite dare to risk it," thought Lee. "He does well; I don't believe Isaac is so weak as not know his own mind."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TEETH OF A SPORT.

THE talent surged back to the betting-ring to besiege the "bookies" for the next event, but Lee Westervelt was indifferent to its attractions. He had human beings to plunge on, rather than horses.

Isaac found his way to the bookmaker to whom he had intrusted his money and had his check cashed. He was a tidy winner, but he showed no disposition to continue his betting. Instead, he wandered to one side and stood solitary and quiet.

"I wish I knew what was in his mind," thought the detective. "Roena made a very direct charge in the matter of Charles Gaston, but it does me little good. If I could only get into Isaac's good graces—but I should fail if I tried, and I must be content as it is."

Lee soon took a look at the grand stand. Roena was there, and evidently preparing to play the next race, but there was no sign of Roger.

"What am I to infer from what I have heard?" wondered the Clear Grit Sport. "Plainly, there was something interesting in the past which connected Bartley and Elzora Ames—the 'saint-like missionary' of Roena's talk—can be no other person—but am I to believe all that the female sport said in her passion?"

He pondered on 'this point without getting much light, and finally dismissed it from his mind with the decision:

"I must look into the past of Miss Elzora Ames!"

In his worldly character as a sport Lee had a duty to perform. He was known as a man of clear grit, and he went into the next races as a plunger. He successfully picked winners in all except the fifth event, where he unluckily followed the talent and bet on Wah Jim, only to see Discount brought in by Lamby far ahead of his own choice.

It was just after this race, and while the bettors were in the ring trying to pick a winner for the last event, a sweepstakes for maidens of all ages, that Lee found himself in front of the stand once more. His gaze wandered around in an attempt to sight Roena Rose.

"Ah!" he suddenly breathed.

He had not seen Roena, but had discovered somebody else.

"Ben Leonard!"

Ben was there. He looked like anything but a player of the races, yet he was treading

the stand with all the ease imaginable. Curiously Lee allowed his gaze to follow the man, but there was soon something of more interest.

Lomond paused, and his gaze directed the detective's own. Then it was that Lee saw Roena once more—she was seated at the end of a row of seats, and at that moment Ben Lomond stood almost over her.

"It is she who has his attention, too," thought Lee. "What does he find in her to interest him?"

The female sport was oblivious of Ben's presence. She was looking toward the judges' stand, and, perhaps, deep in the possibilities of the next race.

Suddenly Ben bent directly over her for an instant.

"He whispers to her!" muttered Westervelt.

The whisper, or something else, acted strangely on Roena. Her abstraction vanished abruptly; she raised her head with a start; she met Ben Lomond's regard. Impressed with the belief that he was about to see something of importance Lee continued to watch.

"What!" he thought, "the race-track sharp grows pale! Remarkable fact!"

It did seem remarkable, for Roena had natural high color in her cheeks, and unlimited nerve in her make-up.

"She recoils from him! She is afraid! Ah! he smiles a slow, tantalizing smile, as if he were master of the situation. Has Ben Lomond a hold on the fair Roena?"

Again Ben bent; again he whispered, it seemed. Then he motioned to the rear of the stand. This done he turned and walked calmly back.

"He asks her for an interview," thought Lee. "He seems sure of getting it, too, if he is a rough fellow. He does not once look back; calm and self-possessed, he goes his way. She looks after him; she rises—Ah! she does not seem to find locomotion easy. Is her dress caught? No. Upon my word, it would seem that her physical strength is suddenly lacking. Is she afraid of this person?"

Easily, or with difficulty, as the case might be, Roena had gained her feet, and she started toward Ben Lomond. Again Lee noticed her difficulty of movement; she acted like one prematurely aged as she walked up the gradual rise.

"I will see them closer."

The detective acted at once, and gained a position close enough to observe clearly, though not to overhear what might be said.

Ben Lomond had paused. He was facing to the front, but his manner was that of one who saw nothing near at hand; it was his notion, perhaps, to feign indifference.

Roena reached him and stood looking up into his face. Her back was toward Lee, much to his regret, for he would have been glad to see her face, but it was to be noticed that her manner had lost its old, jaunty way, and that she appeared to droop.

Ben graciously allowed his gaze to fall to her face, but his own expression remained grim.

It fell to Roena to begin the conversation. She did so, and words followed rapidly. She spoke eagerly, nervously and he replied deliberately and coolly. Lee would have given much to hear that conversation.

"She has abundant pluck," he thought, "but Ben has upset her. Why? What is the reason she fears him? True, such a woman as I believe her to be has abundant reason to fear at all times, but it takes much to shake their composure. It has been done in her case. Truly, Ben is no small figure in the firmament."

The conversation continued for several minutes.

"Roena grows firmer," murmured the detective. "She begins to pick up the courage of—well, perhaps of desperation. She assumes an air of threatening import, herself. She has, perhaps, pleaded with him, and now she will show the iron in her nature. Ben, you are an old stager at some things, but you want to look out for her."

This prediction was to be proved more decidedly true than the detective suspected.

More emphatic grew Roena's manner, and more dogged that of her companion. She could not move him, it seemed.

Then even Lee had a surprise. Suddenly

Roena pulled out her ever-ready revolver, and the detective started.

"She turns it on Ben! She intends to shoot! She raises the hammer; she takes quick aim; she—"

Lomond was covered with the weapon, and Lee fully expected to hear the report follow, but Ben was equal to the occasion. With quickness not to be expected of him he flung out his hand and the revolver was seized and wrested away.

Roena stood helpless.

A slow, mocking smile crossed Ben's face, and he reached out and touched her under the chin with an ironical assumption of playfulness.

"If you can shoot I can talk," he added, in a tone so raised that Westervelt heard it distinctly. "Beware lest I do talk, and you know what that will mean. Your past would not look well in a daily paper, though it would be interesting reading."

"Devil!" hissed the female sport.

She struck him full in the face, and then he grasped her arm and gave it a vicious twist. Perhaps it was this, or perhaps there was something to be looked for in the condition of her mind, but, be that as it may, the something suddenly overcame her and she appeared on the point of sinking to the floor.

For the first time Ben showed evidences of alarm, and he caught her and lowered her to an adjacent chair.

"I will get help," he said; and with this he beat a precipitate retreat.

Roena was left half-fainting on the chair, and as all were now intent on watching the last race, which had just been called, she had nobody to watch her but Lee Westervelt. He gazed after Ben Lomond.

"He will not come back. Where is Red Roger? Shall I seize the chance to get into fair Roena's good graces?"

The last possibility was not suggested by any desire to win her good graces as such, but he had begun to think that she was worth knowing in a professional way. Acting on this theory he moved forward and was quickly by her side.

She had not swooned, but appeared near to it.

"Lady," the Clear Grit Sport began, in his most deferential way, "can I be of any service to you?"

"Water!" she gasped.

"Here it is. Drink, and it will do you good. This heat is very trying. I feel it myself."

Roena drank readily, and her recovery was not long in doubt. Her robust constitution helped her, and she quickly lost the worst of her illness. She looked at Lee and smiled.

"Mr. Westervelt!" she murmured.

"So you know me?"

"What frequenter of the track does not?"

"I did not suppose ladies noticed me," modestly replied Lee.

"I have."

"Allow me to say, in return, that you are no stranger to me, madam; I have often seen you in the grand stand."

"And I," added Roena, "have wished to know you personally."

"The chance has come, and it will not be my fault if it is lost."

CHAPTER XIV.

PROBING THE SECRET.

THE Clear Grit Sport spoke in his most telling manner, and that meant a good deal. Roena's eyes grew brighter, and she seemed to find the situation very pleasing.

"I know a manly man when I see one," she replied, "and I shall be glad to have your friendship. You have helped me when I needed help, and I will not forget it. Let me give you one of my cards."

She handed over the pasteboard, and Lee put it carefully away.

"Thank you; I will not forget. Are you recovered now?"

"Quite."

"I am glad to hear that."

"I am not usually weak, but something upset me now—"

"The heat?"

"No doubt."

"Your color has come back, and you need

fear no more trouble, I think. Can I serve you further?"

"You might remain with me for a time, to see that I do not have another attack—that is, unless you will find my company obnoxious," she added, with an attempt at archness.

"Most assuredly, it will not be."

Lee could play a part well when he saw fit, and he did it now. Red Roger did not put in an appearance to make one too many, and they had a few minutes before the crowd began to move away. Then Lee rode back to New York with his new friend.

He left her near her home, after promising to accept the invitation he had received to call. When he left her he shook himself in a discontented manner.

"Roena may be able to pick a winner when the bugle has sounded," he muttered, "but it is her only redeeming grace. I feel the worse for contact with her, but a detective can't pick his company."

He appeared to have some definite idea in his mind, but what it was he did not make manifest.

The continual recurrence of Elzora Ames's name with affairs in which Lee was interested showed him the necessity of learning all he could about her. He knew to whom to apply for a part of this information, and when he had had his supper he set out on a new errand.

He was soon in the presence of a man of middle age whose dress was semi-ministerial.

"How is everything?" the detective asked.

"Very prosperous, Lee."

"Still drumming away at your old calling?"

"I am still an agent for the saving of men and women from the sinks of crime in New York."

"I am glad that you are doing well."

"So am I. When I say that, I do not refer to dollars and cents; that is my last thought. It is to do good that we seek success."

The detective was with an enthusiastic missionary worker, and, as all men like to be humored on the subject nearest their hearts, Lee gave his friend all the chance he desired. Finally he came to business.

"By the way, I think I lately saw a worker connected with your particular association."

"Who was that?"

"A Miss Ames. I think her first name was—well, maybe it was Nora," disingenuously replied Westervelt.

"Elzora."

"Perhaps that was it."

"She is one of our most faithful girls. Where did you see her?"

"Ministering to a poor family down-town. I did not see her to speak with her."

"She is a noble girl."

"Foreign birth?"

"Bless you, no; she is of good American stock."

"What is her history?—I suppose everybody has a history."

"Hers is very quiet and lovable. She was once a moderately gay girl, worldly but full of nobility. She gave deep thought to her present and future life, and decided to become a missionary."

"I had a notion that most people who enter such work do it because they have been disappointed in affairs of the heart," bluntly admitted the detective.

"Bless you, no; nothing of the sort. Our recruits are all with us as a matter of conscience—though I believe, speaking of affairs of the heart, that Elzora did have a young man in whom she was interested, at one time."

"I hope he did not die?"

"Oh! I think not; it was simply that she felt she could do more good as a missionary than in a selfish position in life."

"Has she relatives? Really, you have interested me in this case."

"Miss Ames is an orphan. I have heard her tell of her early life in full. It was uneventful, except for the lamentable fact that she was deprived of her parents when a young miss. Of course that was not the cause of becoming a missionary; with her natural bent of mind she would have been engaged in this work just the same."

"Do you know what her mother's maiden name was?"

"Simmonds. I remember her mentioning it."

Lee had thought the name might connect with what he knew, but it did not, it seemed.

"After being left an orphan she was cast on her own resources, I infer."

"Yes."

"How did she live?"

"She was a private teacher."

"And gave that up?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"Well, to be frank, I think—I do not know this—she was, I suspect, going to be married."

"To some rich man?"

"No. He was on a pilot boat."

"Ah! I know a pilot named Ross. I dare say he was not the man."

"No. His name was Isaac Bartley. A wholesome, honest young fellow, and Elzora was not to blame for fancying him, but she finally saw her duty clear and did not throw herself away."

"Throw herself away?"

"That is what it amounts to when a young lady marries. There is chance for all to do much good in this world, you know. Marriage, however, engenders mere selfishness, and takes all of one's time. Married women are of little use to our cause. No doubt Miss Ames saw this, so she gave up Mr. Bartley and became one of our band."

"I see."

"And, sir, she is one who will stick by us. Some young women come to us only to weaken, later on, and marry. Elzora will not do this; she is wedded to doing good, and selfish views will never take her away from duty."

These fanatical doctrines did not cause Lee any thought, except that he was doubtful. He knew his companion of old. Still, he did not believe he had heard a correct estimate of Miss Elzora Ames.

"Was Bartley reconciled to being dropped?" pursued the detective.

"I do not think so. In fact, I have reason to believe he made matters very unpleasant for the noble girl when she announced her decision."

"Why do you think so?"

"First, she came to us very sad and down-hearted—she did not like to give pain, you know. Next, I am aware there was quite a little disturbance of some sort. What it was I don't know; I had this from our mutual friend, Gardner, but, of course, I would not ask him for particulars."

The detective perceived that he had worked the claim to the end. His companion was so bound up in one idea that he would not see what was spread before his very eyes, so he could not be expected to see what was in the background.

The mention of Gardner had put matters on a different footing, however, and Lee became anxious to drop the man he was with. He did this skillfully. He led him to speak of other persons connected with the mission, and so made the conversation general that it did not occur to his companion that the questioner had unusual interest in Miss Ames.

When the blind had been carried far enough Lee took his leave.

He lost no time in getting to Mr. Gardner's home.

This time he did not have to use so much circumlocution, and the matter was soon fully broached. Gardner leaned back and surveyed his visitor steadily.

"Do you know what you are touching on?" he asked.

"No. Do you?"

"Vaguely."

"What is it?"

"Suppose I said a crime?"

"A crime?"

"I say, suppose I say that? Again, suppose I say a scandal?"

"Was there one?"

"Frankly, I don't know. Miss Ames had a little romance in her life. Some romances have the odor of clover about them, and some that of the stable. What the exact nature of hers was I can't say. Beyond doubt she expected to marry Isaac Bartley.

Just why she didn't I can't say, but rumor was busy. Further, rumor said—"

"What?"

"To be frank, that she really did marry him, much to her harm."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DETECTIVE GETS NEW LIGHT.

LEE WESTERVELT betrayed no surprise at this intimation, but quietly answered:

"Then you have reason to believe there was a marriage?"

"I have reason to think there may have been," amended Gardner; "I do not commit myself in any way. There were rumors, which were promptly squelched, that Elzora Ames married Isaac Bartley."

"Much to her harm," you said, a moment ago. Where did the harm come in?"

"There's the rub. What was it? What clouded her life over and sent her forward to the career of a missionary? Rumor said—"

"What?"

"Various things. First, that there was bigamy in it all. Who the bigamist was, if there was one, rumor did not agree. Some reports said Elzora already had a husband; others said Isaac was supplied with a previous wife. Which it was I don't know."

"You seem to take it for granted there was a marriage."

"No. I take nothing for granted, for I don't know the truth. It is possible there was one, and it's possible the separation came too early for that."

"Do you know of any way to get at the truth?"

"Ten days ago I should have said yes."

"What has ten days done?"

"Killed the man who held the key to the riddle, and, I suppose, buried him by this time."

"Who was this man?"

"His name was Charles Gaston."

"What?"

"I see that you recognize the name as that of the man who was the victim of the live wire tragedy."

Mr. Gardner smiled lazily as he said this. He believed he had read aright, but he little knew how much there was that he did not read, or how suggestive the name was to Westervelt. Gardner paused for a moment, and then added:

"Gaston was the man who broke off the match."

"How did he do it?" asked Lee.

"I'll be shot if I know. He was the evil genius of it all. Isaac and Elzora were going ahead swimmingly, so to speak, when Gaston stepped in with leaden shoes and knocked the whole scheme in the head. Yes, his shoes were leaden, and his hand was iron. Rumor had it that he and Bartley nearly had a fight, and there was general bad blood. I imagine that Isaac and Elzora will not shed many tears over his death."

"I wish you could be more definite."

"I wish I could. I can't, however. All I can say is that the ugly rumors of bigamy were never disproved, to my knowledge. There was no prosecution, though I have heard that Gaston once stated that he could send one or both of the young people to prison, if he wished. He said this while still very angry against Bartley, but, when he had cooled off, he closed his mouth and was mute ever after."

"Did the secret die with him?"

"I doubt it."

"Who else knows it?"

"If there was bigamy, the minister who married them must know of it, of course."

"Who was he? New York is large—"

"If there was a marriage it was performed by a minister in a small place in New Jersey. By consulting some letters which I have I can learn the name of the place and of the minister."

"I wish you would do this."

"I will, and I'll send you the names tomorrow. Will that do?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to prove them bigamists?"

"I would rather prove them otherwise."

"You will have a hard task, I fear!" dryly answered Gardner.

"You admit there was nothing but rumor."

"There was smoke; there must have been fire. Anyhow, depend on it that Isaac and Elzora hated and feared Gaston, and that they are glad he is dead."

The detective did not linger much longer. When walking away the words here last recorded recurred to his mind with striking force.

"They hated and feared him!" muttered Lee.

Long he pondered over the situation, and Ben Lomond was lost sight of as an agent of evil for the time. Suspicion seemed to point strongly to the couple whose happiness had been interrupted by Charles Gaston, and it was a dark suggestion. All that had been learned before which pointed the same way was remembered, and Lee shook his head.

"If I was disposed to judge hastily I should say my parties were revealed to me; but one swallow does not make a summer."

The detective's course took him along Hudson street to its junction with Eighth avenue. He was passing the little park in the middle of Abingdon Square when he chanced to look leisurely into the mass of green which made the park an oasis of the vicinity.

As he did so he saw two persons standing at one side, engaged in earnest conversation. The light did not fall fully on them, but Lee was quick of eye, and he made an immediate discovery.

"Elzora and Bartley!" he murmured, stopping short.

He was surprised. Luck was beginning to bring in evidence, as well as hard work. He kept his gaze riveted on them.

"Why do they seek an interview in this out-of-the-way place?" he wondered. "Elzora may be a missionary, but it seems she has time for something more. I wish I could get position where I could listen to them."

He could not do it; that was sure. The little park was not calculated for such purposes, and from his present position it was out of the question.

He did the next best thing. He leaned against the fence and assumed the character of a mere idler! It was calculated to deceive any one who might see him, for the weather was warm and idlers were not uncommon in Abingdon Square.

"This is no love meeting," thought the detective. "It is one of grim business."

The comment appeared well founded, for the two young persons were very earnest of manner.

"Why couldn't they have chosen a place where I could listen?" grumbled Lee. "A little use of my ears, now, might put me right in touch with the whole mystery. Come, speak out, and let the whole facts be unfolded. Speak out!"

Perhaps if he had given the advice audibly something might have come of it, but, of course, he did not speak aloud.

"An out-of-the-way place for them to meet," continued the detective. "Didn't they dare to meet openly? I wonder if this is their first meeting since their separation, or—did they meet at Gaston's death-bed?"

Lee was patient, and he continued to watch.

"Both are nervous over something. Elzora seems highly wrought up over the situation, and the calm missionary is proved all woman. What is the sort of woman she is?"

A moving figure on the other side of the inclosure attracted Lee's attention. He looked hard at the unknown.

"A man who appears interested in them. He watches sharply, and has some purpose in view. Is he a beggar who covets a dollar, or— Upon my word, it seems to me he is playing the spy, just as I am!"

Lee shifted his position a little, but the second prowler did not allow him closer scrutiny. The unknown walked slowly on until the entrance to the park was reached, and then came into the inclosure.

"He is bolder than I am. He means to pursue his object to an end. He advances toward them— Hallo!"

The prowler suddenly became something more than an ordinary man.

"Upon my word, it is Red Roger, the welcher!"

The detective grew freshly interested, and not a little excited. Red Roger was trying—

to get near the young couple secretly, and the links of the chain began to weld more firmly. If there had been any doubt that Roger connected with the mystery of the case it was gone.

The welcher was bold, and he advanced straight toward them until only a bush separated him from his marked prey. There he paused and appeared to relapse into nothingness. Innocent enough he looked, but he was in position to hear what was said.

"Will he escape observation?" wondered Lee. "If so, why wasn't I equally bold? But if he is allowed to carry on his scheme Isaac Bartley must be a blind man. Men should not sound secrets without knowing whether they are safe."

The conversation continued, and Roger listened.

Lee was growing nervous. He did not know what his duty was in the case. Ought he to warn the young couple? Was Roger an ignoble spy or the reverse?

"Confound it!" muttered the detective, "why is Isaac so careless? He should—Ah! he stirs; he looks around; he sees the prowler!"

Bartley had stopped short in his speech. He looked hard at Roger, and then suddenly left Elzora and passed around the bush. He stopped before the welcher.

Red Roger made a show of examining the bush, and bent his head low.

"Well," abruptly demanded Isaac, "what are you doing here?"

The welcher straightened up, but kept his head lowered.

"What?" he replied, in a hoarse voice.

"I say, why are you acting the spy?"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SPY COMES TO GRIEF.

THE voices were no longer low, and Lee Westervelt had no trouble in overhearing all that was said. Red Roger still took pains to keep his head down, but he had to make some sort of reply.

"I am not acting the spy," he answered.

"I say that you are!" retorted Bartley, hotly.

"Ain't this park free ter all?"

"Not to spies."

"Everybody comes here. Why, it was only a bit ago that there was singing and carrying on below us, and nobody interfered."

"Never mind what others have done. Who are you? Hold up your head!"

"My head is all right," growled Roger.

"Let me see your face."

"What business is it of yours whether I have a face or not?"

"I am not here to argue," answered Isaac, sharply. "I want to see you, and I will. Hold up your head!"

"I won't!"

The welcher was defiant, but Isaac would brook no more delay. He took a quick step forward, and his companion, startled, obeyed without thought. Believing he was to be assaulted, he raised his head quickly and it was all over. Isaac stopped short, amazed by his discovery.

The light fell full on the two, and Lee could see that Roger's expression was hostile, defiant and ugly.

"So it is you!" exclaimed Isaac.

"Well, what of it?" retorted Roger.

"Just this! I know you fully now."

"You know a man who is your better, then."

"I know a cur who is a spy!" hotly exclaimed the pilot.

"Come, come! Go light."

"You did not succeed in getting me in your power up at the race-track, and now you take another way. Why do you spy on me?"

The welcher was no coward, and, as it dawned on him fully that he could not excuse or atone for his course, he assumed a new manner.

"See here, Mister Man, this city is free to all, and that includes me. Men can come and go as they please, and that is what I am going to do. I don't recognize your right to interfere with me, and I will not allow anything of the sort. Drop your bluster, or I will knock your head off. See?"

Roger blossomed out as a true tough, but

this did not deter Isaac. He met the threatening gaze of the welcher firmly.

"It strikes me I shall be the one to do the punishing act. This city may be as free to you as you claim, but the freedom does not extend to spying on me. Get out of this park!"

"Get out?"

"Yes."

"At your say-so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I like that. Why, confound your impudence! you ain't man enough to make me go. If you try it I will tweak your nose and toss you over the fence. See? As for why I am here, I reckon you don't want to ask that question in a court of law."

"I ask it here."

"I know, but if I tell it will be in court. Put me there and I will whisper what I know about you and gentle Missionary Elzora."

"You know nothing to her hurt."

"No? How did Gaston die?"

"How do I know, knave?"

"You know well, scoundrell!"

"I do not, and I will not have you evade the point thus. If you persist in remaining here, you can do so, but you will not have us for company. Come!"

The last words were to Elzora, and she started. Red Roger's ugly mood was at its worst, however, and he blocked the way.

"It was a sorry day for Charles Gaston when he interfered with your schemes, wasn't it," he sneered. "It cost him his life."

"You villain!" passionately exclaimed Elzora, "how dare you insinuate that?"

"Because it is true."

"You lie!" cried Isaac, losing all patience.

Red Roger was of a class in life whose chief religion is to put every dispute to the test of muscle, and he acted now with his usual rule. He reached out and slapped the pilot's face. This done he started to move back out of the way, but he was not quick enough. If he was a fighter so was Isaac, and the clinched hand of the young man shot out and caught the welcher under the chin.

Roger fell like a stricken ox in the shambles.

Hard heads are capable of withstanding hard knocks, and the welcher leaped up with unexpected quickness. He came to his feet with his hand fumbling at his hip-pocket, and in a moment more a revolver was revealed. He turned it upon Isaac.

"Your life shall pay for that!" he hissed. "I will shoot—"

"Nothing but your mouth!"

At the first sign of the revolver Lee Westervelt had decided that his policy of silence was done with, and that he must interfere or have another murder case, but when he lifted his arm and would have cried out to Red Roger, somebody else took the job out of his hands.

The very unromantic words last addressed to the welcher were spoken with a cool, sneering utterance, and the revolver was wrenched away.

"If there is any shooting of lead here," added the arrival, "I will do it, and I'll fill you so full that your undershirt will not fit!"

"Ah!" murmured the Clear Grit Sport. "Ben Lomond!"

Ben Lomond it was, and he looked very near as big as a house as he stood there. His tremendous muscular power was revealed in part, and he hovered above Roger threateningly.

The welcher, ready the moment before to spill blood and revel as a tough, now acted quite differently. He looked hard at Ben, but that was all he seemed capable of doing. Ben, however, gave him a contemptuous glance and then shook a finger at him warningly.

"Say, do you want to be wiped out of existence?" he asked. "If you do, just say the word and begin. It won't be a battle of revolvers, though; you can depend on that. A New York tough always goes to his revolver when hard pressed, but a man who has lived with African Bushmen don't need any such aid. Why, you little whelp, I could thrash you silly with one hand tied behind me. You, a fighter? Bah! you are only a coward; that's all."

"Be careful!" muttered Roger, hoarsely.

"Careful?"

"I can't endure too much."

"Feel ugly, do you?"

"I won't be bullied."

"Um! Huh! Wah!"

Ben Lomond grunted picturesquely and watched his enemy with grim unconcern. Then he added coolly:

"Don't endure nothing. Don't be an angel when you feel like a devil. Don't curb your hot blood, but let it went. Pitch in! Fight! Do something business-like, or else shut your mouth up and cork it."

Red Roger wiped his face nervously. He was beaten and he knew it. He dared not attack Ben Lomond. He preferred to live on and try to get square in the dark, coward-fashion.

He backed off slowly.

"I will go," he muttered, huskily. "I have too many against me, and I am a law-abiding man. I don't want trouble with nobody. This row was not of my seeking; I have simply been forced into it, and abused shamefully."

"So you have," sneered Ben. "An African python snake always feels that way when a Bushman gets him in a snare, but, all the same, that python is crammed full of pure cussedness. You are off the same stripe. Get out of Eden, snake!"

Red Roger had backed off until he was well away, but the words of his big enemy were far from making him reconciled to such positive defeat. He hesitated and seemed disposed to renew the struggle under any condition, but prudence finally won the mastery. Without another word he walked out of the park and stalked away down the Square, his face toward Hudson street.

"A good man to have absent when you are present," commented Ben.

"Sir," replied Isaac, "we owe you many thanks for your kindness, and—"

"Not at all; not at all! I only did it because I wanted a row. When I was among the Bushmen it was one continual fight, and life was worth living. New York is a dull place. Why, I haven't killed more than two or three men since I came here."

The pilot looked puzzled, but Elzora managed to speak.

"Isaac, this is Mr. Lomond, the gentleman of whom I told you—"

"Ben Lomond, suspected of murder," added Ben, explanatorily.

"I presume this is a joke—"

"Not at all; not at all. I am accused of killing Charles Gaston, and I defy the police to prove me innocent."

During the altercation nobody had raised a voice sufficiently to attract general attention, but Isaac was observing, and he now noticed the Clear Grit Sport leaning against the fence. He spoke in a lower tone to his companions, and Lee lost all run of the conversation.

Evidently, the trio decided that the park was not the place for an interview, for they soon moved on and left it. Lee managed to keep them in sight, and he set out to see the end of the adventure.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SPORT BECOMES A CHAMPION.

NOTHING came of the pursuit. The three persons went to the corner of Eighth avenue and Fourteenth street, and there separated. There was that in their manner which told that they did not intend to do anything unusual, so the Clear Grit Sport gave up the trail then and there.

He was not disposed to seek his own quarters yet. The evening was not so far spent but what something might possibly occur which would interest him, and as he knew Red Roger's favorite haunt, he moved downtown with the intention of visiting a certain resort of horse-fanciers and race-bettors.

It took him to a quarter of the city not so desirable or safe as the vicinity of Abingdon Square, but this was nothing to him. He was moving along a poorly-lighted street and fast nearing his destination when he was startled by the cry of a woman.

"She's in trouble!" was his thought.

He was near a corner, and he dashed forward and turned the obstruction to his view. Then there was no obstruction, and he saw an exciting scene.

Not far away several persons were tangled up in what seemed to be a hopeless sort of a

knot, and from this came certain wild cries in a boyish voice.

"Let me go, you thug! Kick up a row on the street, will you? Molest a woman folks, will you? Ef I's only big enough I would wipe you out o' sight. Take that, you thug!"

Evidently it was a belligerent youngster who spoke, but if Lee had been disposed to think from this that the scene was trivial he would have been undeceived by the fact that one of the group was a woman, and that she seemed to be struggling in the grasp of a man.

Plainly, it was an occasion when the help of an honest man was needed, and Lee ran forward quickly. Just then the group broke up and a single man became separated from the rest with the woman in his arms.

"No use, my beauty!" cried this person.

Her anxious gaze was busy, and she caught sight of the detective. She stretched out her hands imploringly.

"Help! oh, help!" she cried.

A few long strides, and Lee was by her side. He caught the man by the arm and wheeled him around roughly.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"None of your business!" was the retort.

"What are you doing with that woman?"

"She's my wife."

"Oh! no, no!" was the cry of the woman. "I do not know him; he is a stranger to me, and he has tried to carry me off. Save me, save me!"

"Ef he tries it he will get his stomach full!" asserted the thug. "Get out!"

The last words were to Lee, but they were not obeyed. With a sudden motion Lee pushed the fellow back, and then drew the girl closer to him.

"Keep off!" he cautioned.

"Take that fer your meddlin'!"

The rough leaped at the rescuer, but nothing would have pleased Lee better. His title of "The Clear Grit Sport" had not been won by his career as a turf-plunger alone, and he well knew how to take care of himself. His assailant found it out now. Lee's clinched hand shot out, and his enemy fell with a heavy shock.

He did not lay passive a great while, but struggled to a sitting position. He did not come further up. Clapping his hand to his mouth, the loosened teeth of which were already beginning to shed blood, he raised a mumbling voice:

"Help! Here, this way! Help! The scoundrel has knocked my jaw open!"

Two men remained, and they shook off the boyish figure which had been hanging to them, and then rushed at Lee.

"Look out!" gasped the girl.

Lee did look out, though not in the way she meant. He stood his ground unwaveringly, and the fresh assailants were met as the first had been. Lee's fists seemed to turn into battering-rams, and a shower of blows fell on his foes. Well, indeed, was he proving his right to the title of "clear grit."

"That's right, mister," shouted the boy. "Knock the stuffin' out o' them, an' count on me to help you. Here goes!"

The speaker leaped onto the back of the nearest man, and Lee, thus relieved of one of his adversaries, gave the remaining one a stroke which satisfied his desire for fight.

Number Three shook off the boy, and the three roughs backed off somewhat, each feeling of his hurts.

"Police!" exclaimed the boy. "Here come three blue-coats!"

It was only a trick, for no officers were in sight, but it worked to perfection. The roughs had been severely used, and their desire for more of the sort was so small that only the cry of the quick-witted boy was needed to play havoc with them.

"Police!" echoed one of the trio, and then the three took to their heels and dashed away down the block.

The boy laughed heartily.

"Say, that's what I call a bruisin' race to the stretch, an' then a reg'lar walk home on our part."

Lee was looking at the girl.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

She drew a deep sigh.

"I think not."

"They were handling you roughly—"

"Didn't we do the same trick?" demanded the boy, exultantly.

"If we go to a police station we may effect their arrest—"

"No, no!" exclaimed the girl, "I could not endure the publicity."

"Do you know them?"

"No."

"Common street ruffians, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are free from them—"

"Thanks to you! Oh! sir, you do not know how grateful I am—from the depths of my heart I thank you."

"You are quite welcome to all I have done, but do not forget that you had other help. This boy—"

"Oh! I'm her sister—I mean, her brother, an' I'm s'posed ter wallop any tough who molests her. It was nothin', Nell; not half so excitin' as runnin' a game horse through the stretch."

Lee looked sharply at the boy.

"Hallo, Jimmy Newdick!" he exclaimed.

"Hullo, you! What! do you know me?" and then Jimmy lowered his voice and secretly added: "Pretend you only know me a little."

"You are a jockey for Gaston and Fredrickson," replied Lee.

"Correct! I ride Aztec Chief, an' any other corks that I'm put on! You look like one of the talent. If you are, did you ever know me to be false to my duty?"

"Never!"

"I never pulled a horse, nor got left at the post by design, nor worried the starter until he clapped a fine on me."

"Your reputation is good, I know. You say this lady is your sister, do you?"

"I suspect I did. She's cashier in a drug-store, an' that is why she's out so late. She wouldn't be otherwise. See?"

"Yes. It is a pity that there are men so depraved as to molest a lady even at this hour."

"There are piles o' them. You an' me know life as it is—if you are one o' the talent—an' we know there are crooks in all trades, even that of drawin' breath."

"True."

"Well, s'pose that this gent an' me see you home. Then maybe he an' I will take a stroll about town."

Jimmy looked wishfully at Lee as he spoke, showing a strong desire to get on more intimate terms with the handsome sport, but Lee caught a glance from Nell Newdick which told that she did not wholly approve of the plan. Still, she was under indebtedness to Westervelt, and she could not say much against it.

The girl was escorted home, and then Jimmy asked briskly:

"Where do we go now?"

"Have you any particular place you want to go to?"

"No, only I'd like to make the rounds with you, an' see life as you get at it."

"Your sister does not approve of it."

"She didn't say so."

"I could read it in her manner."

"Nell means well," apologetically replied Jimmy, "but she don't know what it is to be a boy. Boys have to see life."

"My advice to you is not to see too much of it, Jimmy. If you want to ride winners on the track, or be successful in any way, don't try to mix painting the town red with your regular business."

"Aw! I've heard that before," murmured the jockey disgustedly.

"I will not dwell on the subject now, for I do not think you are a youth with evil propensities. Further, you can go with me, for I am merely intending to drop into a resort of horsemen. The company will be that of a class you meet every day at the track, so it can't injure you more there than at the paddock. Come with me, if you wish."

"Lead on, boss. I'll run you an eyelash race to the judges' stand, an' we'll win ef we don't go stale. Drive on the cart!"

Jimmy beamed all over at the prospect.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WELCHER RIDES HIGH.

CONTINUING their progress, the Clear Grit Sport and Jimmy were soon at the semi-hotel where, as has been indicated before, lovers of horses and horse races were accustomed to gather. A considerable number of

these men were there on this occasion, all smoking, drinking and talking with more or less animation.

Lee Westervelt was well known, but he managed to get to a seat at one side without being noticed. He then looked the crowd over. A motley gathering it was, in one way, though all the men were influenced by the same ruling motive.

He saw owners of horses, trainers, jockeys, touts and grooms, and he saw, too, bettors of all grades, from the time-seasoned plunger to the penurious piker who was eager to happen on a dead-sure thing. Of the pikers nearly all were young—very young, in a double sense—and it was amusing to see how they listened to the veteran sports.

They were there for tips—not knowing that the tip that is told abroad is the worst thing to touch that the race-track affords.

Lee recognized two men who were just then of special interest to him. They were Red Roger Peters and Tommy Meehan, the tout. The two were in earnest conversation at one side, and too much absorbed to see anybody else just then.

Jimmy Newdick presently turned to Lee and observed with an air of pride:

"There are men here who have won big money on my mounts."

"You know them, then?"

"Most of them, and some of them have come to me and told me that when in the saddle they felt sure they could bet high, if my mount was any good."

"I am aware that you are credited with honesty and good judgment."

"I never pulled a horse or throwed a race," proudly declared Jimmy. "As for judgment, I've done my best. Horses differ. Some of them are best rode accordin' ter the Father Bill Daly method—send them to the front, first-off, an' try ter keep them there. Others can't be handled so unless you want them to die away in the stretch."

"True."

"Now, there is Aztec Chief. He's in for a big race at Sheepshead in a few days. If the field is what it looks likely ter be I shall let somebody else act as pacemaker, an' keep the Chief under a good pull for at least half a mile. At some point I'll let out a link—possibly not until the stretch—an' then you'll see me come flyin' in a way that will make the rail-birds holler themselves purple in the face."

Jimmy was enthusiastic, but his comments ceased as another boy pushed his way to the middle of the room, having just come from the street.

"That's Con Steward, the jockey," Jimmy remarked.

Con looked around, and then advanced to a table at which several men were seated and spoke in a voice none too low.

"Say, gents, I've got somethin' interestin' here."

He displayed a paper.

"What is it?" asked one of the party.

"Writin'."

"Tips?" asked one not the previous questioner.

"Naw! What good is tips? About equal to a sellin'-plater. Gents, there is a well-known name signed ter this."

"Whose?"

"Charles Gaston."

The jockey was not talking in a way to advertise himself to all who were present, but those who did hear him were interested at once. Several who were at other tables gathered nearer, and among those Lee noticed Red Roger and Tommy Meehan.

"Let's see it," suggested a trainer.

"Where did you get it?" inquired another man.

Con saw fit to heed the last question.

"I come by this in an odd way," he explained. "I was passin' along the street when it fell right out o' the clouds."

"How's that?"

"Dropped down on my head."

"From where?"

"I might say the air, or a winder, but, ter be frank, my notion is that it sailed off from a roof. That's the way I studied it out."

"If Charley Gaston wrote it," suggested a groom, "let's nail it up here on the wall as a memento of him."

"I don't think it's poor property enough ter be wasted," replied Con. "It concerns

somebody besides Gaston. Did ever one o' you hear of a gal named Elzora Ames?"

"No."

One man answered very readily, but some who did not answer might have improved on the reply. Red Roger moved close to the jockey, and Lee Westervelt, suddenly becoming interested, rose and stood near Con.

"Let's see the thing," directed the groom, impatiently.

"Wait! Before I show up I want to say I need your advice on this point. This paper may be of value in the ketchin' of Gaston's murderers. Mind, I don't commit myself, but it speaks of private affairs, an' shows that Gaston held a secret over the girl mentioned—this Elzora Ames, whoever she may be—an' that he contemplated givin' her away. He says in the paper—it is a letter from him ter her—that it would ruin her if he told all he could."

"Say, the explanation of Charley's murder may rest right on that letter!" exclaimed a listener.

"Just what I think," added Con.

"Women are just as vicious as men."

"Let one be in danger of being disgraced, and she won't hesitate to do up a man."

"There is a woman in every plot."

"I'll bet a woman was in Charley's death."

These casual comments were thrown out freely, several men taking turns, but Lee Westervelt said nothing. He was, however, the most interested man there.

In obedience to another question Con told the exact place where he had found the paper. It was just where Lee had secured another paper which concerned Gaston and Elzora—the street was the same, and the two papers had descended to earth in the same way.

This suggested the theory to the detective that the document he had secured was only a part of what had been near. His fingers fairly itched to grasp this new evidence.

He had been looking at it closely when he chanced to raise his eyes. His gaze fell upon Red Roger's face, and the look he saw there gave him a shock. The welcher was all eagerness, and his eyes blazed with a strange light.

"The fellow will get that paper if he can," thought the detective.

Con was of a mysterious nature, it seemed, and he had withheld his trophy until he had thoroughly aroused the curiosity of all. He was now satisfied, and he partially extended the document.

"I ain't much on the read," he confessed, "an' I will let one o' you gents do it. Who will read it aloud?"

Red Roger started forward.

"I'll give fifty dollars for that thing, unread!" he exclaimed.

"What's that?"

"I want that paper."

"Why?"

"Gaston was a friend of mine."

"Wasn't he the friend of all of us?"

"I'll give fifty for the paper, unread."

"He takes it for a sellin'-plater," laughed a trainer.

"Why is it worth so much to you?"

"Just for curiosity."

"If its value comes so high for that reason it must be worth something to the rest of us. Here! Let me read it."

Con withdrew the paper.

"Fifty dollars is a good deal o' money," he remarked.

"Roger will not give it."

The welcher pulled out a roll of bank-notes.

"Here is the stuff," he declared. "Give me the paper!"

"It's yours."

Thus spoke Con, and he put the paper further out. A hand was laid on it, but it was not that of the welcher. Instead, Lee Westervelt closed his fingers over the document.

"Wait!" he directed, coolly.

Red Roger's hand stopped in mid-air. He had almost touched the paper, but Lee was just ahead of him. His hand stopped, and then fell to his side. He looked at the Clear Grit Sport, his surprised expression gradually giving place to a threatening glare.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Wait!" repeated Lee, calmly.

"What for?"

"Don't be in haste about this."

"What's it to you? I've bought the paper."

"The goods are not delivered."

"Do you object?"

"Yes."

"You had better not. I don't allow anybody to meddle with my affairs."

"A commendable decision, but this is no more your affair than ours. Con has no right to sell the paper; you have no right to buy."

"I have bought it, and, by Judas! I will have it!" cried Roger, hotly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

RED ROGER was angry and excited, but the Clear Grit Sport had never been more at ease and unconcerned, as far as appearances went. The scene was impressive. Con was in the center, holding the paper and looking confused; Lee was on one side, holding his hand over the coveted document, while the welcher was on the other, eager, scowling and angry.

The detective had fully made up his mind that the welcher was not going to have the paper. Roger was unfriendly to Elzora, and would be glad to get any point against her. Even if it was not so, he was not the person to handle what might prove important evidence.

The two men were by this time surrounded by all the sports near, and, as a result, all eyes were on them.

Lee was not known as a detective to any one there, and he certainly did not want to betray his real profession, so, as all knew him as a sport, it seemed like a meeting of two men nearly on a level, except that one was known as "square," while the other was a welcher.

Westervelt remained cool and wily.

"Pardon me, Mr. Peters," he replied, "but I think you are speaking hastily. I deny that Con has a right to sell this thing. It is not his—"

"He found it."

"But it is not his."

"No. It is mine, for I have bought it."

"You can only buy of the owner. We have Con's statement that this concerns Charles Gaston—"

"I only read a little of it," interrupted Con, "for I ain't no reader. I didn't get at the gist of the thing."

"Let a committee read it," suggested a trainer.

"No," replied Lee. "Just now the affairs of Charles Gaston are of vital interest to the police. Let us send this paper to Police Headquarters, to be seen only by the superintendent."

"I object!" shouted Roger. "It is mine."

"It belongs to the police."

"Maybe they will get it later, but it is mine now."

"We have no right to interfere with such a thing. We may upset the ends of law and justice. Do not all here want to see Gaston's death avenged?"

"We do!" was the chorus.

"Then send this to the police."

"That's right."

"Send it to them."

This chorus told Roger that he was almost alone in his views, and he grew more angry. He was determined to have the paper, and his resolution grew stronger, if anything.

"I deny the right of anybody to meddle with me," he declared, again.

"Gentlemen," added Lee, "let us name three of the best men here to have charge of this, and let them go with it to Mulberry street at once. If it is good for anything, it should be put in use at once."

Again there was an approving chorus, and the welcher grew desperate. Have the paper he was bound he would, cost what it might. Con was still holding it between him and Lee, and he did not let the chance pass. There was a premonitory glitter to his eyes, and then he moved.

His hand shot out and closed—not upon the letter, but on Con's own hand. Lee had recognized his purpose, and moved even quicker than he.

The Sport snatched the letter away.

It was the final feather, and Roger waited for no more. With a cat-like bound he flung

himself upon Lee, and his greedy fingers sought for the paper. For a moment the two men were mixed up in a tangle, and then the welcher was flung back by his opponent's strong arm.

Roger was not defeated or discouraged. He was fighting mad, and he again leaped to the attack. This time he did not seek to seize the letter, but his fist shot out in an attempt to hit the Sport.

The blow was neatly dodged, but the fight was fully on. It was hard to follow what came next, for they were thoroughly mixed up, but the spectators grew more awake to the possibilities of the scene when Tommy Meehan leaped to his friend's aid, and added his efforts to knock out the Sport.

"That ain't fair!" piped Jimmy Newdick, shrilly. "Give him a show. Take off the tout! What! won't nobody do it? Then I will!"

The loyal jockey leaped upon Meehan's back, but just then Lee showed that he did not need aid. He gave Meehan a blow that knocked him over so suddenly that luckless Jimmy fell under him, and then a second scientific stroke felled Roger by his aide's side.

Both were down, and hit so hard that they stayed there.

Westervelt gave them little attention. He looked around quickly for something else. He had been able to retain his hold on the letter but briefly. During the savage attack it had gone from his hand. He now looked to re-locate it, but saw no sign of it.

"Who has the letter?" he demanded.

Nobody answered.

"I say, who has that letter?" he repeated.

"I haven't seen it, Lee."

"Nor I."

Several voices joined in the latter words. Everybody looked honest, too, and a search was begun under the supposition that it had fallen to the floor. It was not found there.

"Well, this is remarkable," exclaimed one of the party.

"Has anybody left the room?" asked Lee.

"No, I think not."

"Then somebody has secreted the letter. Who is it?"

"Yes, who has got it?"

Others took up Lee's question, and there was a general disposition to sift the matter to the bottom. Roger and Tommy were still weak of limb and muscle, and it was ascertained by actual search that they were not the thieves.

The detective began to be worried. It was as good as decided that some member of the party had secreted the paper, and he was not disposed to let the trick succeed.

"Gentlemen," he spoke, earnestly, "we decided that that letter should go to Mulberry street, didn't we?"

"Yes."

"Is there now any less reason for it?"

"No."

"Then don't you agree with me that the document should be found?"

"Yes."

"Then I suggest that each man here be searched for it."

"I second that motion."

It was settled, and the search was made, but nothing came of it. The letter was not found; it had disappeared wholly and completely.

Lee was more disappointed than puzzled. It was plain that somebody had stolen it skillfully and got it out of the room. Whether the thief had been somebody not then there, but had slipped out quietly, or whether it had been done otherwise was not clear. The main fact was that the letter was gone.

It seemed that Roger and Meehan were not in the plot. Not only had they been flat when the letter went out of sight, but they seemed as ugly over its disappearance as they could well be.

Conversation had been spoiled by the occurrence, and as the hour was growing late the party began to break up. When Lee went Jimmy Newdick kept near him.

"Which way, boss?" he asked.

"East, for awhile."

"I'll go along with ye. Queer about that paper, wasn't it?"

"Yes."
 "Maybe I kin spot the thief."
 "How?"
 "By keepin' my eyes open. Mind, I don't say I kin, but he was a horseman of some sort, an' I may get a line on him."
 "Locate it, and I will pay you well."
 "Boss, I won't refuse that offer. Money ain't ter be despised by my family."
 "Are you poor?"
 "Ter be frank, we have ter hustle fer keeps. Nell works as cashier, an' I ride fer my livin', but we have all we kin do ter beat poverty in the stretch each day."
 "Are there only two of you?"
 "Two? Wal, I should remark. We count up five."
 "Who besides you and Nell?"
 "Oh! my mother, an' then there's Rena, my sister that's been sick in bed fer four years."
 "Four. Who is fifth?"
 Jimmy hesitated for a moment and then tersely replied:
 "Whisky!"
 "How is that?"
 "Some folks have fathers. I'm one o' them; I have one. His name is Whisky. I believe he was baptized Jonas Newdick—my mother calls him so, anyhow, but I think o' him as Whisky."
 "I understand," quickly replied Lee. "So matters go hard with you. Don't you make money riding?"
 "Some, but you'll remember I ain't a Taral, a Simms or a Garrison. I don't get mounts like Ramapo, Domino, Sir Walter or them cracks. I am a kid, now, an' I have ter ride fer men who lose oftener than they win. When I get older I hope ter ride fer the Keenes, or Gideon & Daly, or some o' them other great owners. Aztec Chief is all right, but what is he to a winnin' mount fer big stakes? Take the day o' the Great Eclipse Stakes at Morris Park. It was fer two-year-olds, you know. Mr. Frederickson said he was goin' ter run a colt he had entered, but the blamed nag was bein' fired fer a splint about the time the race was called, and all I could do was to stand idle an' see the crack jockeys bring out the crack racers. The stakes was guaranteed ter be twenty thousand dollars, an' Garrison landed the prize on Connoisseur. Littlefield yanked the bun, an' that meant a good pile ter Garrison fer his mount. How much do you s'pose I got fer playin' rail-bird?"
 Lee very willingly let Jimmy talk. The boy was very much in earnest, and his manner was rather fascinating to the Clear Grit Sport.
 The latter encouraged the boy all he could, wishing him the fame later on, but not too far away, of a Garrison or Taral.
 "I'll call an' see you some time," added the detective.
 "Jimmy's eyes brightened."
 "Do ye mean it?"
 "Yes."
 "Cricky! Just you do it, boss, an' I will have a prime cigar fer you ter smoke. Come around!"
 "I will. Don't forget to watch out for tidings of that missing paper."
 "You bet I'll be on the look. But, say, sport, didn't you just smite them two duffers like blazes. Sore heads they'll have tomorrow. You're a good one, an' I'm glad ter know you. Shake, boss!"

[CHAPTER XX.

IN THE JOCKEY'S HOME.

It was nearly twenty hours later, and night was again over the city of New York. In the Newdick home the single kerosene lamp cast a feeble light on the smoke-blackened walls and the poverty-pressed inmates of the home.

Just then two of the members were absent. Only the three females were present. Jimmy was out on some business, and Mr. Newdick, senior, was supposed to be testing the capacity of his voluminous stomach as a reservoir for poor whisky. At this occupation he was a passed grand master.

Of this home Nell was the bright ornament. Rena, her invalid sister, was more conspicuous for her patient suffering than anything else, and Mrs. Newdick had yielded to something like despair long ago. She

did not furnish any part of the cheerfulness.

A knock sounded at the door.

"Miss Ames!" exclaimed Rena.

Nell hastened to the door and opened it. Elzora Ames was there. She was no unusual visitor. This was one of the families she had helped in her capacity as a city missionary, and in no other was she so much interested, or so warmly welcomed.

This occasion was like the rest, and there was a general conversation in which all felt interest.

"Where is Jimmy?" finally asked Elzora.

"Out for awhile; we do not know where."

"I wanted to see him."

"He would be glad to see you, I am sure," replied Nell.

"I am not so sure of that."

"Why not?"

"You know he does not approve of my efforts to have him abandon the race-track."

"Jimmy means well," put in Rena, quickly.

"Certainly he does, and I do not complain of him, but I think it would be better for him to be in some other calling."

"Where would we get our money?" asked Mrs. Newdick, quickly.

"I have a chance where he can enter a store. The pay would not be large at the beginning, but he could work his way up, and, in the mean while, our society will do what we can for you. In other words, we will not see you suffer."

"You are very kind, miss," murmured Rena.

"It may be the making of Jimmy."

"Do you know what Jimmy will think?" asked Nell. "I don't want to cast cold water on your plans, but you can set it down that he will not agree to any plan which will lessen his earnings."

"But if we help you—"

"You know Jimmy's way. He is so independent."

Elzora did know it. She had tried in various ways to get Jimmy out of his jockey career, but without result. He had been quite as resolute as she had been, and everything had failed thus far. Now, she had a fresh plan, but she was not very hopeful of it, for Jimmy was likely to be the same old Jimmy.

The point was still under discussion when there was another knock at the door. This time Nell did not open it, for the applicant did not wait for help. He opened the door himself and walked in calmly.

It was Arad Frederickson.

Elzora started. She thought this last visit a most unlucky chance. In one respect she was wrong—there was no chance about it. Arad was there, not because he had happened in but because he had followed her. He had decided to enter, but merely because he wanted to see more of her, and to make progress in his effort to gain her good-will.

He smiled blandly on all, and bowed with Chesterfieldian grace. He knew he would not be snubbed by the Newdick family, and suspected that if Elzora wanted to snub him she would not dare to do it.

"Dear me! it is Mr. Frederickson!" exclaimed Mrs. Newdick. "Why, Mr. Frederickson, how do you do, sir? We are so glad to see you, sir. You are welcome to our poor home; you are, indeed, sir!"

She ran forward and placed a chair for him, after which she wiped it off with her apron. It had been spotless before, but, to her, he was a sort of a king, and nothing could be too good for him.

"Bless me, Mrs. Newdick!" he returned, "what a good soul you are! You remind me of my mother; you do, indeed. A good woman she was—so thoughtful of all who came near her."

"She must have been a good woman, sir, or she would not have had such a son, sir."

Arad blushed. Modesty and he were not well acquainted, but, for the moment, he took a mental picture of his depraved life and shame got the better of him. Then his gaze wandered to Elzora, and all of his purposes received new life.

"Well, Mrs. Newdick, and how are we all?" he buoyantly asked. "How is your troublesome tooth, and how is Miss Rena?"

Well did Arad know how to be agreeable to such a person as Mrs. Newdick, and he succeeded well. He let loose a flood of

words, and received ample information, especially about the toothache.

All the while Elzora sat in uneasiness. She wanted to get up and leave, for she was afraid of Arad, but that very fear kept her from being too precipitate—she dared not run the risk of offending him by going immediately.

Frederickson knew what he was about, and he soon shifted conversation skillfully.

"Jimmy in?" he asked.

"He's out on some errand, Mr. Frederickson."

"I wanted to see him about a mount which may bring him in hard cash. He can ride for other owners, possibly, in a certain race. Of course he is under engagement to me, but I would loan him, and it may be a bonanza."

"Bless you, sir; bless you! How good you are!"

"I am interested in the family. I believe, Miss Ames, that you feel the same way?"

"I do," Elzora agreed.

"Then our interests are mutual."

Nell looked apprehensively at Elzora. She feared that Miss Ames would open her favorite hobby of taking Jimmy from the track, and if she did, it would speedily be found that their opinions, at least, were not mutual.

Elzora, however, was too shrewd to press her views when Jimmy's employer was present, especially when the employer was Arad Frederickson.

The horse owner was in his best spirits, and he talked on rapidly, and with a certain humor which pleased Mrs. Newdick, if not anybody else; and he so managed that Elzora had to take part in the conversation.

Elzora did not know what to do. She did not want to remain, and she was afraid to go. Thus, considerable time passed, and she was finally obliged to make a decision. She rose and announced that she would take her departure.

Frederickson calmly rose, also.

"I will see you to your car," he remarked.

"Oh! I will not put you to the trouble," she hastily answered.

"No trouble at all, I assure you, and it will be better at this hour, will it not, Mrs. Newdick?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; no young lady should go unprotected at this hour, sir. New York is a nest of iniquity, sir. It was not so when I was young, but the city is now full of ravening wolves seeking somebody to devour them—I mean, seeking somebody to devour. Mr. Frederickson, you and I know little about the wickedness of this great city, sir."

"I fear we do not," responded Arad, gravely.

"Anyways, we keep our skirts clean."

"Neat as a laundry job, Mrs. Newdick."

Arad could still talk to the old lady, but he did not forget Miss Ames. Despite her fresh protest, feebly made, he followed when she left the room. Her heart sunk; she did not want company, and she was afraid of Arad. Better chance all with the strangers of the street than with him.

He did not want to be classed as she classed him, and he talked in his most agreeable manner as they moved down the street. He spoke for a time wholly of the Newdicks, and seemed deeply concerned in their welfare, but it was not that which he had on his mind.

He finally came to business.

"Miss Ames," he said, in his best manner, "chance has brought us together, and I, for one, am not sorry for it. I find you a new creature to me. Your work as a missionary is a noble one, and it proves you a noble woman. I would like to know more of your life."

"It is very simple; it is merely to visit the poor as you have seen me visit to-night."

"A grand work!" exclaimed the horse-owner, with a show of enthusiasm. "Is more help needed in it?"

"In what way?"

"Can't I assist you, somehow?"

"You can learn by applying to the superintendent of our mission."

"Miss Ames, I apply to you."

"But I can do nothing."

"Let me be your aid—your friend. Miss Ames, I fear I spoke hastily to you on a

former occasion. Let me take it all back. I have done some thinking since then, and the result is that my eyes are opened. I want to show you this is true."

"But I am not a head of any institution. It is to them you—"

"They are nothing to me; you are much. Will you accept me as your friend?"

CHAPTER XXI.

UNDER WATCH.

ARAD tried to make his manner more than ever winning, but he did not succeed. It would have taken something little short of miraculous, under any condition, to make him agreeable.

He had the mingled air of a man about town, of a sport and of a horseman, and though some persons would not have found the combination offensive, it was not so with Elzora. To her this man and his kind were simply disgusting, and food for fear. And she was afraid of Arad Frederickson for more than general reasons.

She tried to find some suitable reply now, but without satisfaction to herself.

"Mr. Frederickson," she replied, "if you wish to talk of connection with charitable objects, please apply to the superintendent."

"I am not speaking of charitable things now," coolly answered Arad. "I am speaking of you. Can I be your friend?"

"I—I do not know what you mean, sir," she faltered.

"I want to see you often; to visit you as a friend; to have part in your hopes and plans."

"But I have no time to receive visitors, and my time is all taken up with my duties. I visit the sick and needy, and it is all I can attend to."

"Let me go with you on your professional calls."

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"Because I am often nurse, as well as caller, and my calls are often long."

"It is very evident," cried Arad, irritably, "that you do not want to have my acquaintance."

It was evident, but she did not dare to confess it.

"I am too busy to think of anything else," she responded.

"Nonsense!"

"It is true."

Frederickson walked in sulky silence for some paces, his gaze bent on the ground. Then he looked up suddenly.

"Would you have refused Charles Gaston?" he demanded.

"Refused him?"

"Suppose he had said that he wanted to be on friendly terms with you?"

"I do not refuse anybody's friendship, but I have not the time—"

"Gaston knew certain secrets of yours."

"You do not know that!" declared Elzora, with more emphasis.

"We shall see. I say that he did know them, and I feel that he would have been alive to-day if he had not known. I do not know that your hand struck the fatal blow, but I am well aware that you do know who killed Gaston. Do you wish the world to know? If not, better use me less harshly. I generally learn what I undertake to find out, and if it is a thing possible I will learn who killed Gaston."

"It is nothing to me, for I do not know. Your insinuation that I was party to it is absolutely false, and you can investigate if you will—you will find nothing against me in it. More than that, your threats will not make me accept your undesired company; they have the opposite effect, and I tell you plainly that I do not want your company. Here is my car; I will leave you."

With these words she moved quickly forward toward the car, and she went alone. Frederickson had not accepted the rebuff kindly, and he would have been still further an actor in the scene had he not felt that it would not do to make trouble with a careful of people near. He hesitated as to his proper course until he had seen the car move on with her as a passenger, and then it was too late to meddle further.

"Another rebuff!" he muttered. "I am

among the ruck, but I may pull up in the stretch. She has not seen the last of me."

If he had not followed somebody else had. Unknown to him there had been an attentive observer of the interview, and, when Elzora took her car, the aforesaid observer took that just behind it, and went rolling in the same direction.

"The show seems to be over," murmured this observer, "but it will do no harm to watch out a bit longer."

The speaker was Lee Westervelt.

Pursuing his plan he went to where Elzora alighted, and then followed further without arousing suspicion on her part.

"It must take considerable courage for a woman like her to tread Gotham's streets alone by night, for she can't get through without some unpleasant encounters with rascals— Ah! what is that?"

Elzora had stopped short, and just in front of her was a man.

"There's one of the rascals now!" added the detective. "She does not seem so very much afraid, though, and he stands— Hallo! I'll be shot if it isn't Isaac Bartley!"

Isaac it was, and Lee became deeply interested. Rumor persistently connected the names of the two, and Lee was curious to see from their own conduct what relations existed between them.

"The meeting is a surprise to both," he pursued, "and they do not appear to know what to do. It can't be any great pleasure, I should say. What relations can there be between them?"

The pause was broken. Bartley advanced toward Elzora, and the two shook hands.

"Friendly!" murmured Lee.

They relaxed their hold and began to talk. The street was a quiet and respectable one, and, just then, it was nearly deserted. The Clear Grit Sport had slipped into a doorway, and the young couple saw nothing to indicate that they were under watch. They spoke earnestly and rapidly, and Lee analyzed their actions.

"They had something more than trivial to talk about, but it does not look like a social matter. No love scene, that. Is it the meeting of partners in guilt? Who knows? I don't claim to."

The conversation went on. Facial expressions were lacking at that distance, but their motions told much to the spy.

"It is not a happy couple. Trouble seems to brood over them. Isaac makes fierce gestures, as if rebelling against fate. Elzora's head droops and she appears in despair. He beats his foot angrily on the sidewalk. She clasps her brow like one dazed and sick at heart. What are the emotions which stir them?"

It was aggravating to be so near them, and yet unable to hear a word. Lee felt it fully.

"A few minutes within hearing might settle all I want to know. I can only see that they are in trouble. Whether it is the trouble of innocence or guilt I know not. Injustice and fear work about the same on the human mind. One thing seems sure: these persons are not lovers. Neither shows one sign of that."

His analysis was correct, for the thing they showed most of all was mental disturbance. If they were guilty of Charles Gaston's death, the deed seemed to have brought its own punishment.

For a long while Lee stood and watched, but the interview was over at last. They separated. Then, for the first time, there was evidence of more than ordinary good will between them.

"He advances close to her!" murmured the detective. "He takes her hand; he looks around to see if they are observed; he bends over her—Ah! he would have kissed her, I do believe, but she shrunk away from the token of love. She recedes from him; she says good-by; she moves off in one direction, wiping the tears from her eyes, and he goes the other. Sorrow goes, too, and in double form. It accompanies both of them."

Westervelt was a detective, but he had a human heart left, and for the moment he forgot all but their mental distress. Then he aroused.

"She will doubtless go directly home, but I will make sure of it. I will see her inside her door."

This was easy to do. She did go directly home, and when the door closed the espionage was over.

Straight to his own home went Lee, meditating as he walked, but there was nothing to tell the current of his thoughts. When he reached his private room he found his faithful aid, Nathan Short, already there smoking with relish. The aid nodded quickly.

"I've been waiting for you."

"With news?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I've been to Jersey."

"To find the minister?"

"Yes."

"What luck?"

"Good."

"You found him, then?"

"I did."

"What was the result?"

Nathan spread out a written manuscript of considerable size.

"There is the result."

"So you have reduced it to writing."

"No. The minister did it."

"An unusual step."

"He was a fussy old fellow who persisted at every step of the way that he was afraid of being misquoted. It seems that the simple-minded old fellow had an experience with a newspaper reporter, once, who did not remember with immaculate accuracy. Smarting under this affliction our minister preferred to put his short story in writing. We lose nothing by it, and the story is here. Acting on the clues you gave me I found him without difficulty. Here is the result!"

Nathan tossed the paper to his superior.

"Read a chapter from the past of Elzora and Isaac!" he added.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THEY WERE MARRIED.

THE Clear Grit Sport sat down to read the paper, and this is what he found recorded. The minister, who signed his name in full, had begun by declaring that he had all his life been conscientious in marrying couples, as well as in pursuing the other duties of his calling. Having put himself on record, he added:

"One day, there came to me a well-built, athletic young man who requested me to marry him that evening. I felt from the beginning that I need not hesitate in the matter, for he had the air of a plain, substantial man who would not do wrong, but I questioned him somewhat before agreeing to his proposal."

"He said his name was Isaac Bartley, and that of his fiancée, Elzora Ames. It was her first marriage, but he was a widower. Both were past the age of twenty-one. I do not remember the exact age."

"As everything seemed perfectly satisfactory I agreed to the request, and it was arranged that they should come to me that evening as planned. My wife and her brother were to be the witnesses, and the ceremony was to be in the parsonage."

"They came according to the contract, and I was as much pleased with the bride as with the groom."

Lee smiled quietly at this point. It was clear that the minister, scenting trouble, was bound to have it understood at the beginning that he had been conscientious in all he did, and that if there was a loose link in the chain it had not then been visible to him.

The detective read on.

"My wife was much pleased with the bride, and she did all she could to make her feel at home. Little time was lost in proceeding to the ceremony. The couple took their places."

"I well remember the air of mutual love they had, and there was certainly nothing to show that any shadow of trouble lurked back of the union. They were not gay, but deep love and peace seemed to be the ruling emotions."

"I married them, and Elzora Ames became Mrs. Isaac Bartley."

"Some things are most untimely, and some events occur just too late to avert calamities. It was so then. Congratulations were scarcely over when there was a

knock at the door. I opened it, and a rather rough-looking man walked in. He had not asked my permission, and he did not then take any more notice of me than if I had been a tree by the wayside.

"He strode forward and confronted the married couple.

"His face was dark and ominous, and I could see that the young couple appeared agitated at sight of him. He did not long keep his silence.

"Is this iniquitous ceremony over?" he demanded, sharply.

"The newly-made pair were mute, so I replied:

"This holy union has been completed, sir!"

"I intended to crush him with severity and needed reproof, but he did not feel the rebuke.

"I say," he added, "has this iniquity been done?"

"I have married this couple, sir," I asserted, with fresh severity.

"Then you have been party to bigamy!" he exclaimed.

"What?" I gasped.

"Bigamy is the word, sir!" he curtly added.

"My wife and I stood dumfounded, and the young couple were in the same mood. They looked at the stranger and appeared incapable of motion. He was like Banquo's ghost at the banquet.

"The stranger seemed to struggle with some strong emotion, and then he turned wholly to me.

"Are you in the habit of aiding bigamy?" he snapped.

"My indignation found vent in language sharp and scathing.

"Sir," I cried, "you will prove this charge or answer to me for maligning all here. You speak infamously, sir, infamously—unless you speak with truth. Marriage, sir, is the most holy of human ties, and you should not trifle with it. Such trifling is below the character of a gentleman—far below it, sir. I repeat it, sir, your course is infamous—unless it is true."

"Chump!"

"I regret to say that this rough person really applied this nauseating word to me—to a minister of the Gospel—I, a college graduate and a minister—he called me a chump! It showed his own nature; I will say that if I am of the cloth.

"Then he ignored me once more and turned to the young couple.

"Fine business you are in!" he exclaimed, sarcastically.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Bartley.

"You have committed bigamy!"

"It is false!"

"It is true, and that woman is party to your crime!"

"My good wife moved forward, her noble face flushed, and her manner most impressive. Her voice rung out with thrilling earnestness as she cried:

"Sir, prove your statement or begone from our home!"

"I have nothing to say to you," answered the coarse person curtly. "My business is with them. If they are married it is bigamy. I assert it, and I am one who should know. Isaac Bartley is already married to my niece, Annette Gaston!"

Lee Westervelt lifted his head for a moment and looked at Nathan Short. They had a voice speaking from the grave it appeared, and it spoke to the point. Lee read on:

"This stirred the groom into sudden life and he moved a step toward the intruder, his manner threatening in the extreme.

"You lie, sir!" he cried hotly.

"Oh, you wriggle in vain!" retorted the intruder.

"Annette is dead!"

"She is not."

"If you say that, you do not know the facts, sir. She is dead."

"You twist in vain. I have seen her this day."

"And I say you have not. Charles Gaston, what do you mean by such infamy? You know it is false."

"You are talking for effect. You tired of Annette, and took this way to get another wife—if that is what you call her. Your own course betrays you; you did not go to a

place of open nature, but you are detected. That is a fine state of affairs—detected in bigamy!"

"You speak falsely!" reiterated Mr. Bartley. "Nothing can excuse conduct like yours. If you speak through ill will it is infamous, and it is just as bad if you do not know what you are talking about."

"I will show you that I know what I am talking about!" declared Gaston. "Bah! why do you squirm? You well know how guilty you are; you know it, and so does the partner of your evil doing!"

"Thus far the bride had been standing in silence, utterly unnerved, it seemed, but she now stirred out of the trance-like mood. She turned to her new-made husband.

"Isaac, tell me this is not true!" she cried.

"I do tell you so!" asserted he.

"Is she alive?"

"No."

"She is alive!" snapped Gaston, "and you both know it!"

"The bride moved quickly to his side.

"Sir," she exclaimed, "you speak with infamous falsehood. I never saw you before, and you cannot know me. How dare you charge that I would willfully commit bigamy?"

"I only know you have done it."

"Deliberately?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Bartley again moved quickly to the speaker's side.

"Charles Gaston," he exclaimed, "you have maligned me, and I have borne it meekly, but this let me say—if you charge anything of the sort against my wife I will strike you to the floor, you coward!"

"And you will do right!" added my noble wife, promptly. "He who maligns a woman is a coward!"

"Gaston flushed, and, after a little hesitation, replied:

"You are not wholly wrong. I do not know that this lady has done wrong willfully. Perhaps she has not. Anyhow, I see no need of my making a personal quarrel out of it. All I do say is that Annette is alive, and thus this marriage is illegal. This is all I say; I care no more."

"He turned toward the door, as if to depart, but the bride stopped him, herself.

"Are you sincere in what you say?"

"I certainly am."

"Prove it, then."

"The only way is to produce the other woman. She is not here, and you will have to defer proof until she can be seen. Bartley knows where to find me. Let him come to me there."

"With that he did go out of the room, leaving us an utterly upset company. All my life I have struggled to do what is right, and it is the same with my wife. We could not believe ill of our young people. My wife is very quick-witted, and she asked them to explain. They did so—in part. Mr. Bartley said he was sure his first wife was dead, though he had not seen her lifeless; and that he had erected a headstone over the grave where he had been told she was buried. He said he did not care to go further into particulars, and he did not do so.

"I have since been sorry we did not insist upon a fuller explanation, but it had been very telling on our nerves—even my wife was upset, and she is usually very quick-witted.

"The young people left us. They went in a very nervous and sad mood. It was enough to rend one's heart to see the grief of the bride. She asserted that she still believed in her husband, but one could see that Charles Gaston was a thorn in their flesh. As uncle of the first wife he ought to have known what he was talking about, while it seemed that Mr. Bartley and his bride were not sure, for they had never seen the first wife dead—why, I don't know.

"They went, and that is all I know. I have not seen them since, nor have I heard from them, though they promised to let me know how it all ended. I hope it was for the best.

"Anyhow, my wife and I believe them innocent—they were of noble appearance—my wife, who is very observing, noticed that especially—and I am sure they meant well. As for me, never in my career as a minister

did I do a wrong thing knowingly, and if an error was made I regret it greatly."

Practically, the document ended here, though there were three other paragraphs which reiterated the honor of the writer. He cleared himself as a major duty, and others parenthetically, as it were.

Lee Westervelt looked up, and the two detectives gazed at each other.

"We have moved on," remarked Lee.

"Yes. We know that Elzora and Isaac were married."

"And that Gaston broke up their bliss."

"Observe, however, that the minister speaks of them with confidence."

"I observe more. This minister is not a practical man. All through his story he wandered to boast of himself and his wife. Such a man is not a competent judge of anything. Anyhow, the marriage is admitted."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NIGHT GASTON WAS KILLED.

THE detective discussed the matter from the new point of view for some time. It became clear that it was necessary to learn more of the history of all parties concerned.

"I'll give this job mainly to you, Nathan," added Lee. "Learn what you can of the previous history of Isaac Bartley and Elzora Ames. It ought not to be hard to get pointers on either, though I have once tried it in the girl's case, and made but little progress."

"As the reputed first wife was niece to Gaston, hadn't the Gaston family ought to be looked up?"

"It must. I will try my hand at that, though I expect trouble. I suspect that Gaston did not feel proud of his early life—or it may be it was his relatives that worried him. Even his boon friends among the horsemen know only that he was a horseman. Still, we may catch the key to it all. We must."

"Looks a bit bad for Elzora."

"Decidedly."

"She had cause to hate Gaston."

"So it seems. Well, Nathan, let's to bed and prepare for a hard morrow. To bed!"

They went. The next day Lee was putting away the last of his breakfast when a messenger-boy put in an appearance with a note. It proved to be from the Superintendent of Police, and read as follows:

"Please come to Mulberry street as soon as nine. Important. Refers to Gaston case."

The call was one Lee was not likely to neglect, so, bidding Nathan look for family history, the Clear Grit Sport set off on his errand. On arriving at Police Headquarters he was soon in the presence of the superintendent.

"We have a man here that you want to see, Westervelt," was the first thing said.

"Who is he?"

"A traveling salesman."

"What has he to do with it?"

"He slept next to Gaston's room, the night the latter was killed."

"Ah! now you talk business."

"Further than that I refer you to the man, himself. He is in the next room. Go to him. He is honest and willing, and will tell you all he can."

Lee went and was soon in conversation with the knight of the gripsack. He proved to be all that had been said of him, and started off as glibly as if seeking to dispose of some of his wares.

"Yes, I thought I might tell you something that would help you on the Gaston case. I knew him well; slept next to him for months. The night he was killed I should have been on my way to Chicago, but I did not go. I went around with the boys a bit and got rocky—not loaded, mind you, but just fagged out. See?"

"Yes."

"I came in late, and said to the porter: 'Don't let it be known that I am in the hotel to-night. Get a chambermaid to slide into my room and do the work, and keep it dark. My employers would make me sweat if they knew I had failed to start for the Windy City as they ordered. Here is a fiver. Give the chambermaid what you think she needs of it, and keep the rest yourself. Only be sure that my room is put to rights early, so that even old Jones won't know I was here.'"

"I take it," put in Lee, "that this explains why Jones said one of the rooms next to Gaston had not been occupied."

"Just so."

"Then I understand why we have not heard of you before."

"That's it. Well, now to business. When I went to my room I saw two persons entering Gaston's room. One was a man; the other I then thought to be a boy, as he had a slight form."

"What did they look like?"

"I am sorry to say I can't tell you a thing more than that both had on male garments, and that one was stout and the other slight."

"Proceed."

"They went in, and I went to my room. The brief glimpse I had of them showed me that the larger of the two carried a metal something in his hand which glistened a little in the light. I thought to myself that if it was a hard hotel I should say it was a jimmy. I now reckon they had picked the lock."

"Well?"

"When I got into my room I heard voices in Gaston's room. I did not heed them for a while, but it finally dawned on me, after I had put my head on the pillow, that there were angry voices in my neighbor's room."

"What was said?" asked Lee, eagerly.

"I wish I could tell you, but I can't. I made out that Gaston knew them and that he was angry because they had intruded on him. I do not know that he was aware they had come in surreptitiously—I do not think he was aware of it—but they were not welcome, and he did not want to see them."

"Did you hear names called?"

"No."

"If you could only repeat their words in part—"

"I am confounded sorry, but I can't do it; I can only say that Gaston knew them, resented their coming, and seemed quite cranky over it all."

"Shall I have to be content with knowing that two persons were there? Do I gain nothing only that they were a man and a boy?"

"Partner," replied the drummer, "right here is where the point comes in. That boy—"

"Well?"

"Was a woman!"

"What?"

"As sure as you live, the boy was a woman!"

"How do you know?"

"The voice was that of a woman, and I heard her spoken of as a she and a her!"

Lee was silent.

"It is unlucky that I can tell so little," pursued the drummer, "but I thought it well that you should know this fact. If you have any woman under suspicion, set it down that she is guilty."

"You say you can't give any description of her?"

"I am sorry, but I can't. She came there disguised as a boy, and I seldom take pains to look twice at one of the male sex."

"I think you have not finished your story."

"Sorry, but I have. I was dead tired, and I fell asleep while they were talking. When I sleep I do it for keeps, and if there was anything more to be heard, I did not hear it. In the morning I was up and off early, and I did not hear of the murder until I was in Toledo. I am back, and you are welcome to my little evidence. It only shows that there was a woman in it, but that may be much to you."

Lee did not let the matter rest, and, under his questioning, some of the things the drummer had heard said were recalled, but they were just as unimportant as he had said they were.

When it was all over Lee returned to the superintendent. The latter smiled grimly.

"Do you want a warrant for Elzora Ames?" he asked.

"Why should I?"

"If the drummer told you the same story he did me, you know there was a woman in the case."

"Yes. However, I don't want to spring a trap prematurely. I will not ask for anything of the kind now. When I arrest Miss

Ames I want the chain of evidence complete."

"It is something to know that Gaston was acquainted with his slayers, for it puts robbery out of the question as a possible motive."

"Yes."

"I believe it had been said previously that Miss Ames visited Gaston before at the hotel?"

"She admitted that part, herself, but said it was to urge Gaston to do something to get his jockey, Jimmy Newdick, into a better sphere of life than horse-racing."

Lee soon left Police Headquarters, and noon found him at home for lunch. He met Nathan there with news.

"I have been looking into Isaac Bartley's history," announced Short, abruptly.

"With what result?"

"His friends know he was married, but not at the time when he wedded Elzora, which shows that this marriage was not made public. The one which his friends know of ante-dates that marriage two years."

"Then Gaston seems to have been right in a measure."

"Yes. Do you remember the given name of the first wife?"

"Annette."

"Just so, and that is what Isaac's friends say was the name of his known wife."

"And the last name?"

"Is unknown. Either they never heard of it, or it is forgotten. More, they do not know what became of Annette. It is believed that Isaac did not live happily with her, and that they parted. I have not yet been able to ascertain whether she lives."

"Persevere. We may now rest assured that Isaac did marry Gaston's niece. It seems odd that she does not come forward, if she is living, but she may have her reasons. We must learn."

"Most of all," added Nathan, "we now know that Elzora had cause to be Gaston's foe. He broke up her marriage. What did she do?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DAPPLE GRAY HORSE.

THAT evening the Clear Grit Sport was down-town, and his steps took him to the Bowery. When he was on a case no time went to waste, and both he and Nathan earned all the gains and renown they acquired.

Both had been busy during the day, and now he was waiting for Nathan to join him on the corner of Bond street and the thoroughfare first mentioned.

Lee stood watching the people pass. The Bowery was not the same Bowery he had known in its younger years, and there did not bid fair to be anything to watch except the crowd of merely poor people which, of late years, had taken the place of the roughs and brawlers of old.

While he kept his place the detective saw a handsome turn-out come along Bond street until near the Bowery, and then wheel about and take up position by the curbstone.

Its sole occupant was a woman.

"A stylish-looking person!" muttered Lee. "but she seems to be a bird that fears the light. She is heavily veiled."

Further survey convinced him that she was waiting for somebody. As she kept her place in the vehicle she frequently looked around, and betrayed some impatience and nervousness.

"He cometh not!" thought Lee. "It's a mean man who keeps a pretty woman waiting, and if she is not pretty she wears good clothes. The horse, too, is striking."

The last statement certainly was true. The horse was small of frame, but trim of build, and, in color, of a dapple gray with unusually handsome marks. Westervelt was enough of an admirer of horses to see that this one was out of the ordinary run, and he looked it over as critically as possible at that distance. Once, he was disposed to walk past where it stood, but the chances were that the woman would believe she, not the horse, was the object of interest, so Lee simply kept his place.

The woman kept hers, but not with the coolness of the detective. She was impatient, and, it seemed, somewhat nervous. Frequently she looked around, but nothing came of it for a long while.

She Sport divided his attention between

her and the crowd. If the far-famed Bowery has lost its "tough" character in a strong degree it is still unique, and a sort of congress of nations. About every race of men is represented there in the crowd that flows wave-like at night, and Lee, perhaps hardened by his professional career, imagined he could read criminal disposition in many of the faces, though the owners passed ever so meekly.

"Ah!"

His meditations suddenly came to an end as he caught sight of a party which was made up of neither Italian, Jew, Arab nor Chinamen, nor yet of the more common specimens of foreign races.

In brief, he saw Ben Lomond in the company of two strange men. The three were walking leisurely up the Bowery, but on the lower corner of the cross-street they paused for a moment. Just then Lee noticed casually that the waiting team moved a little away. He thought nothing of it, then; his attention was chiefly on the men.

"If that is the sort of company that Ben Lomond likes," muttered the detective, "he is even lower than I thought him, and that is unnecessary. Regular Bowery toughs, upon my word!"

Ben Lomond did not see the Clear Grit Sport, and he stood under the twinkling lights of the broad thoroughfare a man well pleased with himself, one would say—he was as near jovial as his nature would allow.

A while the trio lingered, and then they turned west through Bond street.

"Shall I follow?" thought Lee. "But why should I? I see nothing in all this to invite me to break my engagement with Nathan. Ben is simply with toughs, and I care nothing for it."

Despite this decision his gaze followed them as they moved off, and he noticed that they walked close together, Ben Lomond in the middle. For a moment Lee wondered if Ben had been decoyed, but the stout adventurer seemed able to care for himself.

Just in the face of this decision came a change of scene. Closely as Westervelt was watching he was puzzled to follow the movements of the party, but, as he looked, he suddenly saw Ben Lomond enveloped in the meshes of a cloth of some sort which had been deftly thrown over his head, and then both of his companions had their arms wound around him.

"Snared!"

The word sprung from Lee's lips, and, as he realized the situation, he ran toward them.

Ben was struggling gamely, but he was prevented by the cloth from putting out all of his strength. He was lifted in the arms of the men and borne away. Then Lee happened to look ahead to the place where the dapple gray horse had been pulled up, and he saw the woman in the vehicle motion to the would-be abductors, as if to urge them on.

"She's their ally!" exclaimed the detective.

Ben was snared, but he was not a tame captive. He twisted and writhed savagely, and succeeded in breaking their hold in part. He gained his feet, and one of the abductors received a heavy blow from his big fist.

"Smash him!" was then the cry of the toughs.

They tried to do all they said. They fell upon Ben, and blows were rained on him like hail. Before the torrent he staggered back, and, as the cloth clung to him pertinaciously and obscured his vision, he could not dodge the blows or give much punishment on return.

He was getting a severe beating.

Lee had kept quiet, hoping thus to secure the toughs, but he was now on the scene. He sprung at the men fiercely and they suddenly received a dose of their own medicine.

Blows fell on them in turn, and the detective kept it up with vigor. He scored no knock-down, but he did do damage and make the fellows change their course quickly.

"Police!" gasped one of them, with the fear of his kind.

Thump, thump, thump! fell the fists of the detective.

"Break away!"

The previous speaker gave this advice.

and they tried to act on it. Turning their backs on the Bowery they took to their heels.

The Clear Grit Sport did not know who they were, but he was not disposed to see them escape. He started to pursue, but luck was against him. Ben was still tangled up in the cloth, but he had got his grip on Lee by chance, and he held on grimly.

"I've got you!" he grated.

"Let me go, you fool!" cried Lee.

"Not much! I've got one of you."

"I am not one of your foes."

"That won't go down."

"Free me, or they will escape."

"I'll free you when you are in a police station; not before."

Ben surely thought he had made a haul, and he held on. All of the Sport's efforts to break that grip were useless. It might have been broken by knocking Ben down, but Lee was not ready to proceed to such a radical degree.

Suddenly he dropped his hands. He had seen the two toughs leap into the vehicle beside the veiled woman; he saw her give the dapple-gray horse the whip, and then the party dashed away.

"Lost!" exclaimed the detective.

He tore the cloth fully from Ben Lomond's head.

"Now, you fool, see what you have done!" he cried.

Ben had been still on his fight, but, at sight of his companion, he became suddenly passive.

"What! is it you?" he muttered.

"Yes, it is I," snapped Lee, "and your assailants have escaped through your folly."

"I thought I had caught one of them."

"You see what you did catch."

"If you are sorry I am more so. Curse the luck!"

"Were they old enemies of yours?"

"No. Just casual acquaintances I picked up here."

"Who was the woman?"

"What woman?"

"The one who was waiting in the carriage with the dapple-gray horse?"

Ben Lomond's face changed to a marked degree.

"What about her?" he demanded.

Lee briefly told of the woman. Ben struck himself a violent blow.

"It was all a plot!" he declared, "and those men did not meet me by chance. It was a scheme to get me into their power."

"Why did they want to do that?"

Ben looked up quickly, and then a cunning expression came over his bronzed face.

"Of course you don't understand," he replied. "Well, it don't matter, and we will say no more about it. Comrade, I am much obliged for all you have done, and I may be able to repay you some time—"

"Do it now!"

"How can I?"

"I like interesting stories. Tell me who those people were, and why they tried to carry you off."

"Messmate, that is private history. As for the men, I don't know who they were—they were total strangers to me—but the woman I do know, and I can guess why she tried to nab me. If she had succeeded I might possibly have been sleeping under the sod by to-morrow. Bah! did she think it would work?—and I a man who have served my time with the African Bushmen!"

Lee made a gesture of disgust and let the matter drop. He had learned just what Ben's stubborn nature was, and felt that it would be time thrown away to try and worm more out of him. Whatever else the man might be, he was secretive and crafty.

Just then the detective noticed Nathan Short on the corner of the Bowery, and he said a few words to Ben to close up the interview and went to his colleague.

The detectives rode home together. Once in their room Nathan relapsed into deep thought.

"How many miles away?" asked Lee.

"I was speculating on how much more we need to make our arrests in the Gaston case. The newspapers have tried the case, found the murderer and sent him to the electric chair. They have settled it all for us. We, however, not having the preternatural gifts of a reporter, must plod along

and find the guilty one, or ones, in our own way. The chances are ten to one that our guilty one and the newspapers' guilty one are not the same. We have talked this over and arrived at a decision. Do we need much more to make an arrest?"

"Could we convict on the evidence we now have?"

"No, but the arrest would doubtless be followed by the finding of more evidence."

"We will pursue our usual course of getting the proof first. As you say, we agree on the various points, and I think we have the riddle solved. That is not enough; we must prove it!"

CHAPTER XXV.

FOUND IN THE PADDOCK.

WHEN the Clear Grit Sport woke the next morning he found a note awaiting his attention. He opened it and read as follows:

"DEAR MR. WESTERVELT:—I am going to Sheepshead, to-day, to try and turn an honest dollar. I have a tip that Will Fonso will win the sixth event, the Grass Inaugural Stakes, seven furlongs on the turf; and as the betting is likely to be against him, it will be a fine chance to make up past losses if he proves to be the good thing. Doggett will ride him, and that means a good deal, you know. He carries one-twenty-two. Will you accompany me? I shall be very glad of your company, and will carry you a part of the way in my own turn-out. If you agree, meet me across the bridge at the place and time mentioned on inclosed card. I do hope you will not disappoint me, for I want your company. Come and see Doggett land his mount; come and see me!"

"ROENA ROSE."

Lee smiled quietly.

"The race-track belle does not need to urge me. Her company is interesting, and I will go, even if Doggett and Will Fonso bring up among the ruck. Nathan, you had better go to Sheepshead, yourself, to-day. You may want to play the races a bit, and those good eyes of yours are worth something. I saw Isaac Bartley when I was last there—you may see Elzora Ames. Who knows? Go, Nathan, and don't spend all your time roosting with the rail-birds."

Little business was done by the detectives that forenoon, but both remembered the engagement of the afternoon.

Lee was not disappointed in seeing Roena. On the contrary he found her waiting at the rendezvous—a well known road-house—and that she was glad to see him was evidenced by the lighting up of her face when she did catch sight of him.

"You are prompt," she exclaimed.

"I always try to be on time, and this was an occasion where I did not lag by the way."

"I am glad, indeed."

"There was a magnet to draw me."

Roena flashed a quick glance to his face.

"Thank you!" she exclaimed. "Two magnets have met, then."

A few more gracious speeches were made, and then Roena added:

"Will you please have my horse called out? You see, being a horse-woman, I own my own nag."

"Do you stable him over here?"

"I am doing so during the Sheepshead season."

Lee expressed approval of the plan, and gave the necessary order. When the horse had been brought around he escorted Roena out. His first sight of the turn-out was one which made him start a little.

The horse was a handsome dapple-gray. Horses of the color were not positive novelties, but this particular one was not new to the Sport. The moment he saw it he knew it was the same he had seen, the previous night, at the corner of Bond street and the Bowery.

More, as he stole a glance at Roena he could almost have sworn she was the veiled woman of that occasion.

"Well, I seem to have got right into the swim!" he thought.

No such comment was made aloud, and they were soon bowling away with Roena at the reins, her cheeks beautifully flushed and her manner that of a happy person.

"I look for rare sport, to-day," she remarked.

"The entries did not look very strong to me."

"We shall not see Ramapo, Henry of Navarre, Clifford, or any of the top-notchers, but the list is fair. The Daisy Strikes ought to be a sure thing for Harry Reed. I am told that Stowaway will be an odds-on favorite for the fourth race, but Picknicker and Restraint will make him know he has been in a horse-race when they pass the wire."

"Do you still think of playing Will Fonso?"

"Yes, and he will not be among the ruck, either. Doggett will land him, if only by a nose."

Roena was full of races and horse-talk, and Lee let her have her fill. She had played the races until she was really well-informed, and as the Clear Grit Sport was fully her equal in this respect, it was a very expert conversation.

Lee, however, was not fully bound up in Sheepshead winners and losers. He was interested in the dapple-gray, and desirous of knowing how Roena came by him.

She talked with what seemed to be perfect frankness, stating that she had bought him three months before, and that he had been in her keeping ever since. Lee, of course, did not mention having seen her the previous night, and she said nothing of a trip then.

Thus, there was no real progress made, but the ownership of the dapple-gray was traced to her.

As they neared the track she returned to the races.

"Will you go into the paddock and size things up for me?" she asked.

"Certainly."

"Get a look at the starters in the first event. I don't know who to play there. I suppose Shelly Tuttle and Merry Monarch will be favorites in the ring, but don't neglect the rank outsiders. See if they seem dangerous, and then come to me."

"You will bet, then?"

"Why, of course. What am I here for?"

Lee decided that the best way to gain further good will from Roena was to help her in this, and he acted very carefully. A visit to the paddock prepossessed him in favor of Hugh Penny, and, at her request, he put ten dollars for her on the horse at eight to one. When their choice won by a head, never ridden to kill, she was in high feather, and Lee went up in her favor.

Other races followed, and, as their luck was good in all but one instance, Roena found it a happy day.

When the semi-final event was past she sent Lee to the paddock to look at the chances of Will Fonso. Others were looking, too, for the talent had a decided liking for Rubicon, and Watterson and Lizzie were not without their admirers, but Lee found Will Fonso so much to his liking that he sent word to Roena to play the colt.

While he lingered, still taking in the various points to be noted only by those who have often been in the paddock, he observed Jimmy Newdick among the crowd.

The jockey had come close to him.

"Hallo! are you with us?" was Lee's greeting. "Do you ride to-day?"

"Naw," replied the boy in disgust. "I might have had a mount, but wot's the use, with Griffin, Simms and Doggett up on the good things? I don't want ter ride an outsider and die away with the ruck before the stretch is reached."

"That's the way to win your way up the ladder and get attention to yourself."

"I had rather get it on a Ramapo or a Domino."

Lee laughed at Jimmy's cool conceit, and then noticed another jockey who was helping a comrade in his preparations.

"Haven't I seen that fellow around town?" asked the Sport.

"That's Marty Flarigan."

"I don't remember the name."

"You'll see him around the paddock most o' the time. He's so mighty poor that he can't get a mount; rides as if he had the pyramids o' Egypt under his legs—but he's great around the paddock. Jest hangs around here all he can, an' is content ter buckle a girth in place of straddlin' a winner."

"He looks like a track-general. He has a shrewd, sly face."

"His sharpness has run out o' his brains inter his face."

The Sport smiled at this conceit, and they had not yet turned their eyes away from Marty when a paper fluttered from his pocket, moved out of place by his brisk motions.

"He's dropped something; pick it up and give it to him when he is at leisure," directed Lee.

Jimmy secured the paper.

"This must be an appointment of assistant groom," remarked the boy, humorously. "Marty never got nothin' else that needed ter be put on paper, by jinks!"

Jimmy had not the most pronounced idea of the rights of proprietorship, and he unfolded his find.

"A letter, I reckon," he observed, carelessly.

Much to his surprise the Sport suddenly snatched the paper from his grasp.

"What's that?" cried Lee.

"Wal, you ought ter know," grumbled Jimmy. "You pounced on it like an owner on a jockey when he gets done up. Want ter buy it of me?"

Jimmy's little joke passed wholly unheard; Lee had something more important to think about. The reason why he snatched the paper was that he had seen something of interest.

The paper was, indeed, a letter, and the name of Charles Gaston was signed to it.

So much Lee saw before he secured it, and afterward he discovered more. It was addressed to Elzora Ames.

Eagerly he read a few lines, and the result was that he received the idea that the paper was something he wanted at all hazards. It was not the time or place to read it, for the paddock was sufficiently crowded so he jostled elbows with other bettors, but he suddenly thrust it into his pocket. Then he turned to Jimmy.

"I said I thought I had seen this Marty before. Was he at the racers' resort the night we had our fight over the paper we lost so mysteriously?"

"Now you mention it, I believe he was," replied Jimmy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT GASTON WROTE.

THE Clear Grit Sport was triumphant. He turned an exultant face toward Marty and then quietly added:

"Bring that young fellow to me as soon as he is at liberty."

"I will," agreed Jimmy.

It was not long before the opportunity was given, and then the desired boy was accosted. He came readily at Jimmy's request. Lee displayed the letter.

"Boy," he began, "did you drop this, just now?"

The jockey's hand strayed to his pocket.

"Guess I did," he answered. "I had a paper, an' now it's gone."

"What was it about?"

"I dunno."

"You don't? How is that?"

"I can't read."

"How did you come by this?"

The jockey's eyes fell.

"I picked it up," he responded, with some confusion.

"Where?"

"On the street."

"Oh! come, now; don't give us anything of that sort. Where did you get it? Speak out!"

"I ain't done nothin' wrong," declared the boy, plainly frightened.

"Then why won't you tell? Where did you get it?"

"Picked it up at the corner o' Broadway an' Greenwich street," he whined, lugubriously.

"Oh! did you? Since when did those streets corner? Now, don't lie. Did you get it at Maloney's saloon?"

"No, I didn't, but mebbe somebody else did."

Marty tried to be stout in his denial, but it was a failure. Lee felt that he had him at bay. The boy was quite as plastic and feeble as Jimmy had claimed, and now he was frightened. Lee took a different course.

Assuring him that he would not be harmed, he asked for the truth and got it.

The history of the paper was just what the Sport thought. Marty had been in the saloon when Red Roger and Lee made the unavailing play to secure it, and he had no sooner acquired it than he ran away with it, not knowing why he did so.

Afterward, he had found it an elephant on his hands. He could not read, so he did not know what was in it, and he dared not show it to anybody else. As a result it had all the while been on his hands.

Lee was triumphant, but he kept cool. He offered to buy it of the jockey, and when the latter said he would not charge anything, Lee persisted and gave him a bank-note with the understanding that he was to keep the matter a secret.

The Sport did not know what he had secured, but it was something he wanted, anyhow, and it was the companion paper to that which had floated down on his head the night when he was on the street.

More, it concerned Elzora and Gaston.

A simple request of Jimmy was enough to secure his silence, and then Lee put the paper away until he could find place and time to read it in safety.

It was now nearly time for the race, and the paddock was a busy place. Owners, trainers, jockeys and bettors touched elbows, and the blanketed racers were the center of attention. It was a scene always interesting, but Lee remembered Roena and determined to do his duty to her fully.

He took another good look at Will Fonso, and then made his way back to the grand stand.

"Why, I thought you would never come!" exclaimed Roena, with a trifle of resentment. "What has kept you?"

"I have been sizing Will Fonso up fully," was the bland reply. "I wanted to be sure of my position. Are you still inclined to play him heavily?"

"I have ten on him, already, and I would like to add a twenty if you think best."

"I do."

"Then I will do it."

"I'll go to the ring, myself."

Lee went. Will Fonso was quoted on the boards at twelve-one, with Rubicon at nine-five, and Lizzie, four-one. Lee took the longer shot, not only for Roena but himself, and then returned to the stand. The horses were soon brought out, and sent away in due time.

Rubicon soon forged to the front and showed the way through the first furlong, but went wholly to pieces before the stretch was entered, and, true to prediction, Will Fonso came away from his field and landed the event by a length and a half.

Roena was a handsome winner, and she gave her exultation full play.

"A long shot is a great card when it wins!" she exclaimed. "See what it means to me! Lots of fun with my friends—and you are one. What is your pet brand of champagne?"

Lee did not feel ambitious to enjoy the fruits of her victory, but he made an answer which satisfied her, and then they left the track and were soon homeward bound.

The Sport was impatient to get rid of her, so he lost little time when he had seen her to her destination. After that he hurried home, and then turned to his latest acquisition, the paper had from Marty Flarigan.

This is what he read:

"MISS AMES:—I have your note. I don't know why you wrote to me, for this thing is becoming unpleasant to me. You and Bartley got into the mess alone, and you should get out the same way.

"One thing I can say positive: I was not joking, nor was I mistaken when I said that Mrs. Annette Bartley was alive. I have now seen my niece—she is very much alive.

"I may have been hasty in charging you with bigamy, but this much is sure—you married a man with another wife. Bartley admits that he never got a divorce, so that is settled.

"I do not say, as you assert, that my niece is an angel. It would not surprise me if she were a devil, for there was blood in her veins which might pan out anything. I do not defend her against you.

"Your faith in Bartley is sublime. So feels every woman about the man she cares for, though he may be a demon. Now, let me say that Isaac is lying—he must be lying—when he says that he believed his first wife to be dead when he married you. Men always say that when they get caught at their tricks. Very likely, though, she did deserve to be divorced—I don't know.

"You say she has tried to exact blackmail, and ask me to stop it. How can I? I am not her keeper, and I never saw her but three times in my life, so I have no standing with her, or influence over her. If she exacts blackmail it is a mean thing to do, but so was it mean for certain parties I can name to commit bigamy. Don't you think so?"

"I have noticed the long list of misdemeanors which you charge against Annette, on Bartley's say-so. If true, she is a bad one. It may be it is true. If it is, I can't help you. You should not have placed yourself in her power.

"You ask about the woman, Mrs. Hannah Sisson. I do not know of her; never heard of her before. It may be, as you say, that she can tell all about Annette and her ill-doings. If so, you had better find her. I never heard of Hannah.

"Finally, I advise you to cease this tremendous fight you and Bartley are making to get out of your scrape. You have made it very unpleasant for me. Do not bother me any more, or I may make it unpleasant for you.

"CHARLES GASTON."

Here the paper ended, and Lee dropped it and leaned back in his chair.

"Hannah Sisson!" he murmured. "Upon my word, I have heard of that woman before. When? Where? I can't place her; I wish I could, I want to know what Hannah knew. A full history of Annette Gaston would be welcome, and I do not see any way, just now, to get it, except by finding Hannah. Nathan has not been able to locate the Gaston family. Their early history is all vague and nobody has come forward to bury Charles. But for the kindness of the sporting fraternity he would have gone to his final rest without a mourner."

Lee toyed with the paper and meditated. He believed that the paper he had himself found and this latest one were mates. Both had been found near Elzora Ames's home, and it seemed they had been lost, and separated, only to be reunited again oddly.

"No hope but in Hannah!" murmured Lee.

Suddenly he had a new idea and began to consider it carefully. The result was that when Nathan returned, presently, his superior abruptly exclaimed:

"I want you to call on Miss Ames!"

"Why?"

"Suppose I said, to have her confess?"

"Then I should think you crazy."

"I will not run so direful a risk, so we will not mention a possible confession. Read that!"

He tossed over the latest acquisition. Nathan read it, and a full discussion followed. Information was mutually given and then the future was looked to.

"What do you think of my plan of calling on Miss Ames?" asked Lee.

"It will show her she is under scrutiny, but what can we lose? It may be a decided gain. I say, let me go!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DETECTIVE TALKS PLAINLY.

NATHAN SHORT walked to the front of Elzora's home.

"A humble place," he meditated. "Just such a one as I would expect a missionary to be located in. However, missionaries do not interest me as such; I think of her as a woman of flesh and blood; a woman with a secret. I will go in."

He rung the bell, and found no trouble in gaining admittance to her room. He found her alone. He entered with a quiet step, and then stood passive, bowing politely.

"I hope I do not intrude," he spoke, mildly.

Whether he was to be regarded as an intruder or not, it was plain that he was not

welcome. Elzora had recognized him with a start, and then she stood still, her face losing color and her manner that of one frightened by a known peril.

"She knows me," thought Nathan.

He bowed again, as politely as before.

"I have called on business, Miss Ames," he pursued, quietly.

"Yes, sir," she faltered.

"If we should sit down—"

He paused, and she took the hint. Apologizing feebly, she motioned to a chair, and he took it with composure.

"I will not delay you longer than is necessary," Nathan proceeded. "May I ask if you have lost anything?"

"Lost anything?"

"Yes. Papers, for instance."

Another start. Elzora had not forgotten the visit of "Jack Sheppard," and his ally, nor that the papers she had tried to keep from them had then gone sailing through the air. She made a desperate effort to be calm. She knew that Nathan was the detective on the Gaston case, and as she noticed that his gaze was ever on her now, she knew it was a time when she needed to rally, if ever.

"I do not have papers," she answered.

Nathan removed a package from his pocket. Carelessly he seemed to handle them, but Elzora grew more worried. They looked exactly like those which had already troubled her so much.

"These were found near here," added the detective, "and, as they were written to you I have come with them."

She reached out her hand.

"I will take them—"

"Pardon me! One moment! These were from Mr. Gaston."

"They—they may be forgeries!" she faltered.

"I have seen to that. They are not."

"If you will let me look at them—"

"Presently. How did you happen to lose them?"

"I am not sure I know what they are—"

"They speak of your marriage to Isaac Bartley, and other things."

He stopped, but there was no reply. She was speechless.

"He also charges you with bigamy."

"It was false, false!" cried Elzora.

"Yet it seems that Bartley's first wife was living."

"Oh, sir, I do not know about this—I do not know! Why have you come to me about this?"

"Well, it is just like this," answered Nathan, mildly. "I infer that you know I am the detective on the Gaston case. Such being the fact, I want to urge the matter on to an understanding as soon as possible. Of course I am sure to get the facts, anyhow, but those who help me to a speedy elucidation of the mystery will receive my deepest gratitude, of course. Further, I will help them all I can."

He paused, to allow the full force of his words to sink into her mind, and then pursued:

"Now, these papers—they mean something. True, they speak of bigamy, but that is not what I want to talk about most."

Again the pause. It was a crafty attempt to put her off her guard, and he was slowly working to that end.

"Dropping the charge against you," sweetly resumed the detective, "let us consider the main facts at issue. I want to learn all I can about Gaston; his past, his relatives and his general life. What can you tell?"

Elzora was silent. She did not suspect any trap, for Nathan was wily and natural of manner, while she was not cunning enough to cope with him; but she did have reasons for not wanting to be too confidential.

"It seems," said Nathan, "that Gaston had a niece."

"Did he?"

"Well, didn't he?"

"How should I know?"

"In this letter he writes to you of her."

"You have the letter; I have not. Of course I do not know what is in it," replied Elzora, growing shrewd, herself.

"Pardon me, Miss Ames, but you do not do yourself justice to deny that you know what this paper is. It is a letter written by Gaston, and received by you. In some way

you lost it—how, I do not know, but it was found at the end of this block. Now, if you deny it, you arouse suspicions of your good faith. Surely, you do not want the murderer of Charles Gaston to escape justice?"

"I do not."

"Then you will see you need to be frank."

"But you charge me—"

"Well?"

"With bigamy."

"In the pressure of more important events I care nothing for the bigamy case. Let us think only of the murder. Will you aid me?"

Elzora drew a deep sigh.

"What can I do?"

"Where is Gaston's niece?"

"I do not know."

"Did you ever meet her?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In this city, months ago."

"Where did she live?"

"I don't know."

"Does Isaac Bartley know?"

"I do not think so."

"At least, tell us all you can of her."

"I can tell but little," responded the girl, unwillingly. "I am aware that Mr. Gaston had a niece. I think he had but little knowledge of her, and associated with her but little. In fact, I have cause to believe that he did not want to know of her, or to meet her. He did not think well of her."

"Why?"

"He was not satisfied with her mode of life, though what the mode was I do not know."

"You saw him often?"

"No, only at occasional times. You see," added Elzora, brightening up, "I visited him to see if he would not help the jockey, Jimmy Newdick, to get into a nobler calling."

"Ah!" replied Nathan, with a touch of sarcasm. "Well, you visited Gaston the evening he was killed?"

"No, sir."

"Miss Ames, were you ever disguised as a boy?" flashed Nathan.

"I, disguised as a boy? No, sir."

She faced him steadily as she made the declaration.

"We have learned of such things."

"That I was disguised as a boy?"

"Were you not?"

"Never, sir, never! Who has told you this? I never did anything of the sort."

"Do you know that Gaston had an enemy?"

"No, sir."

"A suggestion from you might be of great help, and I aid those who aid me."

"Unfortunately, I know nothing about it. I met him a few times, and no more. Of his private affairs and his acquaintances I know nothing. I can give no suggestion; I know nothing."

"Is there nobody who might have got a grudge against him out of this matter?" and Nathan held out the letter.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Did he tell the truth in the letter?"

"No, sir."

"Was there no bigamy?"

Elzora had been of a varying frame of mind through the interview, according as Nathan lulled or harassed her, but she grew excited at once. Her lips quivered, and she gazed pathetically at the detective.

"It is not true," she persisted.

"There was no bigamy?"

"No-o, sir," she faltered.

"Didn't Isaac have another wife living?"

"No!" she faltered.

Nathan thrust the paper into his pocket.

"Thank you for your information. I will go now."

Her eyes suddenly dilated.

"The—the letter!" she exclaimed.

"What about that?"

"Will—you will you give it to me?"

The detective stopped and faced her with an expression of the most complete serenity.

"You say it is not yours—at least, you intimated that it was a forgery, which was equivalent to declaring it was not yours. Why should you want it?"

"It—it may be—"

"Well?"

Elzora stood before him with her color going and coming, and her manner that of

agitation of the strongest kind. Plainly, she wanted the letter, and wanted it bad, but she did not see her way clear to get it.

"My name is in it?" she faltered.

"Yes."

"Then I ought to have a chance to destroy it."

Nathan felt like smiling. Here was one woman who did not show cunning.

"It will be safe in my hands," he calmly replied.

"I would be very glad to get it."

He toyed with the paper, and she stood as if tempted to spring forward and snatch it from his grasp.

"Would it quicken your memory to have it?" he replied. "Can you tell me of Charles Gaston?"

"I know nothing."

He thrust the letter into his pocket.

"Good-day!" he exclaimed, and walked out of the room.

Elzora dropped into a chair, weak and miserable.

"Lost!" she gasped. "All will be found out, now. I am lost!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITH LIFE IN PERIL.

A BOAT was sailing on the lower bay. It contained three persons, one of them the owner of the little craft, who was also sailing-master on this occasion. The other two were Roena Rose and Lee Westervelt. The Clear Grit Sport had not been allowed to forget that he had been accepted as Roena's friend. She had sent another invitation to him, and—the fact that they were there told that he had accepted.

On this occasion Roena, at least, was happy. It is one of the points of female nature that, let her drop ever so far out of the pale of elevated life, she is still capable of having affection.

Roena had hers—it was fastened on the Sport. Her affections were somewhat kaleidoscopic—somebody else might soon reign in his place.

Some women, placed thus with the man of their fancy, might have talked sentimentally. Roena did nothing of the sort. She was true to her idols, and, though it was exhilarating to see the boat cut the waves and catch the fanning touch of the fresh breeze, she spoke of the idol—the races.

"Isn't it a shame that poor, dear Domino was so ingloriously beaten in the Derby?" she lamented. "I just loved that horse; he has an eye on him that a woman might envy—mild and intelligent—I tell you, Domino has a soul, and I know it. Poor creature, to be so beaten! Then there was Senator Grady. Why couldn't he save the honor of the East? It is just atrocious that the West should snap up the plum."

"Owners may some time tumble to the fact that it is folly to ship horses off that way for a special event."

"That's true. The change of climate and water just knocks the horses out. Poor Domino!"

Roena had a large and sympathetic heart when horses were concerned, and she did not let the fact be forgotten now. The ill luck of the great racer had disturbed her not a little.

Later she grew more cheerful, and the two excursionists laughed and talked merrily. The master of the boat gave his attention to his work, and seemed to hear nothing that was said.

Finally Lee turned to the skipper.

"Captain," he asked, "what do you think of the weather?"

"Looks squally."

"Are we safe out here?"

"Safe?" cried Roena. "What in the world do you mean?"

"Would you like to be caught in a squall?"

"Yes. It would be fun!" she exclaimed.

"Death reaps a fine harvest each summer from those who take risks on the water. If you were drowned to-day you would not sit in the grand-stand at Sheepshead hereafter!"

"I don't intend to be drowned."

"Victims of the water rarely do. Captain, do you like the looks?"

"I reckon we shall have a blow, but it may not come to anything."

"Lee, do you want to put in to land?" asked Roena, with asperity.

"I know something about the water, and I am not unwilling to say that I think it would be prudent."

"Oh! come off! I'm not scared a bit. I hired this boat, and I'm not going to be bluffed out of my fun by any measly little puff of wind. Now, don't be scared yourself. Really, are you afraid?"

"Yes."

"Then you are not the man I took you to be."

Roena spoke sharply, but Lee was neither angry nor humiliated. He smiled good-naturedly.

"Have it your own way. I can swim some, and if you are bound to take the risk, I dare say I can look out for myself."

"Perhaps we had better go," suggested the boatman.

"We won't go, and that settles it!" snapped Roena. "If you show the white feather, you'll never get another penny from me."

It was a warning which rarely fails to impress a man who gets his living by letting boats, and they said no more about leaving.

Lee was not frightened, but, being something of a waterman, he knew they were taking considerable risk. The water was rough, and, though it did not threaten immediate danger, there were signs well known to an expert which told him there was worse to come.

The thing most to be dreaded was a squall, and that was just what he did fear.

Time passed, and Roena continued to enjoy herself. The boat moved here and there, keeping in the lower bay, and getting all out of the trip that was possible.

Still, the danger was to come, and when it did it was with the fierce abruptness which had left disaster in its train so often in the past. The warning was too brief to be of any service, too.

Just then there was but one other craft in the vicinity—a boat much like their own, and with a single occupant. He had not been lingering to kill time, but was crossing the bay on business. He had foreseen the squall, and, though it came with the suddenness of a thunderclap, it seemed, he had avoided any serious result.

The danger was soon over. He then looked at the place where the first boat had been.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "they have capsized!"

It was true. The first boat was wrong side up, and Lee and Roena were struggling in the water. The captain had managed to retain hold on the boat, but not so with the others. Lee had caught Roena when they went over, and he held fast, but they had been carried so far from their boat that he could not gain position with the captain.

Now, he was doing his best to keep himself and his companion afloat.

Roena had lost her desire to talk defiance, but she was not proven a mere coward. Thoroughly scared, she still retained coolness enough so she did not hamper him.

It was she who first broke the silence.

"What are we to do?" she asked.

"Keep afloat!" tersely answered Lee.

"Can you do it?"

"I can try."

"Can't you swim to the boat?"

"Not against this current."

"You can't swim to the land?"

The Sport did not reply.

"What can we do?" added the woman.

"Most of all, say nothing," decidedly answered Lee. "This is a struggle for life or death. Strength is most essential—do not let anything be wasted. Say nothing, but trust to me."

As the Sport spoke he glanced toward the other boat. It was right side up, and he thought he saw evidence that it was coming to their aid. Could he keep afloat until it arrived? It was a most momentous question, for until it did come there was nothing to be done but fight the waves, and, doubly laden as he was, this was a serious matter.

Would his strength prove equal to it?

He was a fine swimmer, but his chances were poor and few.

Still he kept up the effort, and the minutes passed. Roena began to see the full force of

the danger, and she grew weak. Both had seen the rescuing craft skimming toward them, but she felt Lee's arms tremble as they held her up.

Would the rescuer be too late?

Nearer, nearer came the boat.

Harder grew Lee's task.

"We shall sink!" thought Roena, with an icy feeling at her heart. "We shall go down!"

The second boat cut the water close to them. If its occupant had been a novice the arrival would have been useless, but he was nothing of the sort. He worked promptly, skillfully and successfully. There was danger to himself, but he finally lifted Roena to his own craft.

As Lee yielded his burden he looked up and saw the water-dripping face of the rescuer.

He recognized Isaac Bartley!

The Sport was a very weary man, but he was not so near to giving out as Roena had supposed. Instead, he was strong enough, and cool enough, to remember at that moment that Roena and Isaac were to be unexpectedly thrown together.

Realizing the possibilities of the situation he acted accordingly.

Isaac risked something to lean over and pull Lee aboard, but it was done without mishap, and then Lee fell in the boat by Roena's side.

He might have risen and taken part with the pilot, but he did not see fit to do so. Instead, he lay prone, his eyes closed, and giving no sign of life.

Roena was slowly regaining her balance, mentally and physically.

Isaac was compelled to give prompt attention to his craft, which he did just in time to rescue it from impending disaster. He then looked toward the overturned boat.

"I need not go there," he spoke, aloud. "The captain is still clinging, and a tug is hurrying toward him. He will be saved, and I need think only of those I have already."

He put the nose of the craft toward the shore.

Lee looked slyly and saw Roena gain a sitting position.

"Cling to yonder rope," directed Isaac.

She mechanically obeyed.

"Hold hard," added the pilot. "I can do nothing for you now, for the waves are fairly boiling, and your companion is unconscious. You must use your own muscle. Hold hard, or you may be tipped out."

"Isaac," nervously gasped Roena, "for heaven's sake don't throw me out. Spare my life!—spare me, I implore you!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SPORT USES HIS EARS WELL.

BARTLEY laughed shortly and unmusically.

"Do you take me for a murderer?" he demanded.

"Spare my life!" repeated Roena; "I am not fit to die!"

"It's a deplorable situation when a person is not fit either to die or live," retorted the pilot.

"Don't tip me out," continued the woman.

"Now, see here! Don't let us have any more of that!" snapped Isaac. "You know as well as I do that I wouldn't do anything of the sort; I am not built that way. If it lies in my power I am going to take all safely to shore—myself and this unconscious man—even you. Don't let me hear anything more about 'tipping you out.'"

"Save me, and I will bless you."

"You always have been a blessing to me," sharply responded Isaac.

"Oh! the waves run so high!"

"So they do."

"We never can get to shore."

"Keep your position and be still."

"I am not fit to die."

"You said it before, and I agree with you. Now, no more nonsense."

"You are unfeeling."

"What do you expect?"

"I am your wife."

"More's the pity, you are."

Lee Westervelt lay passive, but his blood bounded with triumph. Some good was coming out of the adventure, and he no longer had to depend on the word of an outsider for information on that point.

"I always meant you well," added Roena.

She said it with the waves rolling savagely all around them, and the little boat dancing about so wildly that it bade fair to go over at any moment. Her courage was all gone. She had once been cast into the water of the bay, and she no longer had the nerve to meet further peril. It was a craven spirit which possessed her, and she had no judgment back of it.

Isaac remained perfectly cool, and to the last words he made retort:

"You took a mighty queer way of showing it."

"I have been unfortunate—"

"So have I—through you. When we were together you made my life a living perdition, and, when we separated, you did all you could to injure and worry me."

"No, oh! no!"

"For five years I thought you dead; I will give you credit for keeping out of my way that long; but you returned and did all you could to annoy and harass me."

"I—thought it my duty."

"Duty!" echoed Isaac, bitterly. "Well do you fit as a disciple of duty. You came between me and happiness—"

"You committed bigamy."

"I thought you dead. Well, what has it been since? You never asked me to take you back, but you did blackmail me. You made my marriage to poor Elzora the basis of your fiendish work, and you have about beggared me with your demands for money. Money, money! It was all you cared for; it was your God. Blackmailer! That's a pretty word. But it is like your whole history. You and I were married, and I would have done my best to make you happy, but your conduct was atrocious; you know that. We separated, and I thought you dead, but, like the carrion crow, you reappeared when there was chance for a feast. You found your feast—found it as a blackmailer! Now, you claim always to have done your duty and meant me well. So does the Ruler of the Lost mean well to mankind!"

The pilot's voice rose higher, and his manner was full of bitterness. The waves still rolled fiercely around, and the boat pitched ominously, but Isaac handled it with the skill of long practice, and, though each plunge bade fair to be one to death, he brought the craft successfully out of each trough of the sea.

Lee was deeply interested, and he found it hard to keep his place like a dead man. Of deepest interest was this talk, and he took it all in greedily.

He saw that the pilot was all bound up in his subject. Perhaps he had long held his peace—held in the tumultuous emotions which beset him so keenly; but he was free to talk, and he did talk with fervor.

A strange place it was for such conversation, and his words were shot into the jaws of the wind as the boat rose and fell in the midst of its wild leaps.

Roena was in part stunned. She heard all, but it seemed to her that they must be engulfed in the whirlpool of water, and she was weak and frightened. She did not reply to Isaac, and he went on in the same bitter way:

"Charles Gaston told me soon after I first saw him that there was bad blood in your veins. I don't know where you got it—not from him though, for he was an honest man, if he was rough—but it was no news to me that you were all bad. I found it out while we were married, and it has been emphasized since. All bad, all bad!"

Roena moaned, but still she said nothing.

"Gaston said," pursued the pilot, "that he had shaken off all of his family because of the blood in their veins—the blood on the inter-marrying side. You were his niece, but he wanted nothing to do with you. He was a rough horseman, but he felt that you would contaminate him."

Roena's ugly spirit began to triumph over her fears.

"Wretch!" she exclaimed.

"Plain talk does not please you."

"At least, I am not a bigamist."

"I was a mere boy when I married you—"

"Was I younger?"

"No, Annette, but we were old enough to know right from wrong."

"I was not old enough to know a clod-hopper from a man!" she retorted.

"Call me what you will, Annette Gaston."

"Annette Bartley, sir."

"Claim the name, if you will; you cannot claim the man."

"I don't want him."

"I could easily get a divorce, if I would."

"Go ahead, and let us ventilate your second marriage."

For the first time she had the better of the war of words. Isaac winced and made no reply.

"I think," she added, "that the world would like to know your history. It would read well in the papers."

"And yours? And yours, Annette? Charles Gaston was not a proud man, and he would associate with the humblest *at-tache* of the race-track; but did he ever tell the public that Roena Rose, the female sport, was really his niece, Annette?"

"Thank goodness! he did not. I would not have had it known. As for Gaston, don't quote him any more. I may ask you how he died?"

"I don't know."

"You and he were sworn foes, and something may have come of it. I don't claim to know. As for me, I suppose I am his heiress—I know I am—but I would not touch his money. Bah! I want nothing to do with him. Still, if you murdered him, Isaac Bartley, I would—"

"Stop!" cried the pilot. "I will not hear such words. I never harmed Charles Gaston."

"I am not so sure of that. I would like to know, for my relationship to him makes me grieve deeply for him."

"Hush!" suddenly cautioned the pilot. "I think I saw yonder man stir. Say no more."

Lee Westervelt had stirred, but it was a motion of the boat, and not his own will that had been responsible for it. Still, the damage had been done, and both Isaac and Roena seemed anxious to prevent his hearing anything. Their private affairs were dropped.

The Clear Grit Sport lay still for awhile, but the motion of the boat was not pleasant or safe, and he concluded to recover from his "unconsciousness." He had lost nothing by feigning insensibility. The fact had been revealed that Roena was really Annette, and that she was Bartley's evil genius.

The revelation had not surprised the detective.

Before that day he had arrived at the conclusion that she was Isaac's one time wife.

Presently he stirred freely and struggled up. He looked around, keeping a blank expression for awhile, then he allowed a sudden look of comprehension to appear on his face.

"Saved!" he exclaimed.

"All is well," replied the pilot.

"By Jove! it was a close call."

"A nasty wind, true enough."

"Well, I am glad to be out of it."

Lee talked in a roundabout way until he thought his supposed recovery would seem natural, and then bestirred himself more vigorously. They were nearing the shore, and he gave his aid to Isaac and helped on the good work. They landed without mishap.

It amused the detective to see how cautious his companions were. They spoke to each other but little, and then only in a matter-of-fact way. Evidently, they did not want him to know of their acquaintance, but they acted too late.

He had learned a good deal while the water lapped the craft so fiercely on the way to shore. He had moved on a step.

CHAPTER XXX.

A MAN IN THE WAY.

THE tug had followed the sail-boat with the captain on board, and opportunity was now given the party to return to New York by water, but Roena had had quite enough of it for one day. She preferred to go home by land, and this plan was carried out.

She and Lee went alone, for Isaac stated that he had business where he was, and he left them as soon as he could do it without having his course seem peculiar.

At the first possible place Roena found

dry garments, and then she and Lee finished their return trip. She went in good spirits, for her courage had returned when the danger was over.

The Clear Grit Sport made a bland and interesting companion. Not by any word or act did he let her know he had overheard the conversation between her and Isaac, and his manner was the same as usual.

Still, he was more interested in her than when they set out. He and Nathan had before then agreed that her interview with Isaac, some days before, indicated that she might be the one time wife of the pilot. Now, there was proof.

On arriving at New York Lee saw her home, and then set out by himself. Evening was fast moving on into the time when ordinary people think of bed, but Lee decided to make a call before he went home, himself.

He had not seen or heard of Ben Lomond for some time, and, as Nathan had been given other work for the day, the Sport thought it well to see what Ben was about. He called at Mr. Jones's hotel.

He was still unknown as a detective, and, as most of Jones's people were men who made a habit of seeing life about town, Lee would seem at home there in his capacity as a sport.

He walked into the main room and found Jones at the desk and several other men lounging about. Two of the number knew Lee, and he speedily fell into conversation. He kept this up long enough not to seem too anxious, and then carelessly asked for Ben Lomond.

"I ain't sure he's in," replied Jones.

"Went out, did he?"

"I only know he didn't show up at supper. Anybody seen Lomond?"

The question was of the rest of the boarders, and all who had anything to say answered that they had not seen the wanted man.

"I am just going up stairs," added Jones, "and if you will come along I will show you his room and see if he's there. He may have come in since supper. He's queer, Ben is."

Westervelt agreed with the speaker, but did not think it necessary to say so.

They went to Ben's room and knocked on the door.

"He don't answer," remarked Jones.

"Guess he ain't in—or he may be asleep. I'll look."

He pushed the unlocked door open. The room was dark.

"Anybody here? No, I reckon not; there ain't no reply."

"Seems to me there is somebody on the bed."

"We'll see."

Jones used a match and made a light. As the flame mounted the last point was settled. Ben Lomond was on the bed.

"Asleep, sure as guns! Shall I wake him?"

Lee stood looking sharply at the man on the bed.

"See here! Isn't there something odd?"

"What do you mean?"

"He breathes very heavily."

"Ye-es, but Ben is queer," naively replied Mr. Jones.

"His face looks very dark."

"I have sometimes thought Ben colored it. Now, I don't believe his yarns about havin' been among the African Bushmen, and it's possible he does paint to carry out his notion. I think—"

Westervelt stepped forward to the bed. He touched Ben.

"This man is sick!" he exclaimed.

"Sick?"

"Yes. Something is decidedly wrong with him. He breathes like a man with the apoplexy. What's wrong?"

"Well, shoot me if I don't think something is wrong—though Ben is very odd, anyhow."

By the head of the bed was a little stand, and on this Lee noticed a fragment of paper. He caught it up and found words in an erratic, wandering hand. He read easily enough, however, and this was the inscription:

"Poisoned! Annette has done it. She hired him to kill me so she would not be given away to Bart—"

Here the writing ended, looking as if the strength of the writer had failed. That his powers had been feeble before was made plain by the wavering character of the penmanship.

Lee was startled. He believed he caught Ben Lomond's meaning, and there were, perhaps, some grounds for thinking Ben was right. Certainly, there was past evidence that Roena Rose was not Ben's friend, and all these points now became significant.

"What is it?" asked Jones.

"Some erratic scribbling," evasively replied the Sport. "You had better send for a doctor."

"There is one down-stairs."

"Get him here."

The landlord hurried away, and then Lee looked around to see if there were further signs which would go to tell anything. There was nothing, however.

The doctor came, and then he was apprised of the nature of the paper. He did not seem surprised.

"Sure case of poisoning!" he declared; "but it may not be too late. I'll get out my stomach-pump and see what's in Ben."

The doctor was one who ranked very low as a man and practitioner, but he did have knowledge of the present case, and he went to work with a will. The stomach-pump was put in service, and it did its work so well that Ben's stomach soon yielded up its contents.

The doctor noted each change.

"He will soon come around," he prophesied.

He was right, for Ben began to recover. The doctor was puzzled to know what poison would affect a man as in this case, but it did not matter much, if the patient was saved.

Ben finally began to roll restlessly, and presently opened his eyes. He looked around the room, but without seeming to see anything, clearly.

"What's all this?" he growled, hoarsely.

"You are all right," replied the doctor.

"Of course I am, but I feel like a sieve. What's up?"

"You've been sick."

"Sick? I've never been sick in my life. How did—"

He suddenly stirred, and managed to gain a sitting position.

"Say where's that fellow?" he demanded.

"What fellow?"

"The one who came in here."

"We didn't see him."

"He gave me a cigar, and it put my head to whirling, and when I tried to get up he held me. I shammed insensibility, and then he let me down and skipped. I had some life left, but not much. I couldn't get out of bed, or sound an alarm, but I did try to write— Or I think I did."

Ben put his hand to his head in a bewildered way, whereupon Lee bent over him.

"You said that Annette tried to poison you!" whispered the Sport.

"Ha!" cried Ben. "What's that? Annette— Yes, yes; that's true. She was the one who sent him to kill me, for she has tried it before. She would poison me—"

Lee turned to the doctor.

"Is the danger past?"

"I think so."

"Then perhaps you had better leave me alone with my friend. He seems a bit uneasy and wandering, and I think I can bring him around, if he is left alone."

They did not object, and Ben and Lee were soon the only occupants of the room.

"Now you can talk freely," pursued the Sport.

Ben chuckled.

"Say, you are very crafty in your way of drawing me out, ain't you?" he replied. "Want me to give all my secrets away, don't you?"

"I don't know what secrets you have, but it is a fact that Annette tried to poison you, you know. She tried to abduct you down on the Bowery, too, you remember."

"Yes, yes," snapped Ben. "She wants to get me out of her way."

"Why?"

"Because I am in her way."

"You hold her secrets, don't you?"

"Ask her!"

"I ask you. Now didn't I save you down on the Bowery, and haven't I saved you now?"

"Yes," admitted Ben, "you are as true a friend as an African Bushman, I do believe."

"I want to get square with Annette for misusing you so. Can't it be done? What is her weak point? If it happened lately—"

"It didn't," responded Ben, shaking his head. "It was years ago—partly before she was born, as you might say. I know Annette well, and I have cause. Now, she would poison me—perdition seize her!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE "CAN-PARTY" ON THE PIER.

BEN LOMOND waxed violent. His passions had grown so strong that he seemed to want to lay hands on somebody or something, and he made an effort to rise. He did get up in part, but his head whirled and he was willing to remain on the bed.

Lee watched him closely, but no longer with the hopes he had at first entertained of making the man speak freely. Even in his present condition Ben was wily and secretive.

"You have been shamefully abused—"

Lomond interrupted Lee fiercely.

"Abused! I should say I have. Do you remember the night I was attacked on the street when you showed up when my assailants fled? Do you remember the night on the Bowery? Do you see this night? Three attacks, and all due to her!"

"She will kill you unless you get the better of her."

A sneering smile appeared on Ben's face.

"Will she?"

"Yes."

"Not if I know myself. You don't understand what a man is who has served an apprenticeship with the Bushmen."

"Will you sit still and let her try it?"

"Humph! I don't know."

"Why not strike her in return?"

"I can do her no real harm. I do know something to her harm, but it was a matter of long ago, and it's buried now; I should only stir up a miserable mess without any gain, if I went into it. I'll let her alone, and fight it out with her, if she wants fight."

"Of course," replied Lee, seeing that he was going to gain nothing in the way he was pursuing, "you know she is, really, the wife of Isaac Bartley?"

"Is she?" replied Ben, carelessly.

"If you know her well you must know that."

"She don't seem to live with him. Still, she gets pleasure of a certain sort out of life."

"How?"

It was a question designed merely to draw Ben out, but it produced an unexpected result. Ben fell into thought, and then his eyes suddenly brightened. He made another attempt to rise, and this time succeeded very well. He tried his strength, and seemed satisfied with the result. A slight nausea remained as the result of his late experience, but that was all. The experiment made, he suddenly turned to the Sport.

"Come with me!" he directed.

"Where?"

"To see how Annette gets pleasure out of life."

"Where are we to go?"

"If you don't want to accompany me you needn't."

"I do want to; I will go."

"Good!"

In one corner Ben had a big trunk. This he now opened, and then flung out several suits of clothes.

"Fix yourself in one of these," he added.

"It will be equivalent to a disguise."

"Yes."

Lee did not know what all this indicated, but he felt that Ben, with all his peculiarities, was in a measure trustworthy, and he did not long hesitate. He put aside his own immaculate dress and donned one which made him look like a Bowery rough, as far as it could affect him. A few touches to his hair, which was made to stand out at erratic angles, and the work was done. He surely was well disguised.

"Come!" then directed Ben Lomond.

They left the hotel.

Ben acted as guide, and he set off briskly. He walked rapidly, and Lee kept by his side. Not a word was said to explain the object of the trip, but they finally reached the river. Lee saw a pier just ahead of them, and, though the hour was so late, it was not a deserted scene.

A dim light burned there, and men and women were moving about in the devious ways of a dance.

The detective did not need to have this explained. He was too old a New Yorker to misunderstand. He was well aware that, while the majority of piers were scenes of quietude by night, others were given over to so-called "can-parties."

The poorer class of people often find the hot evenings almost unbearable in their close quarters, but, by going to the piers, where the breeze of the water fans the area, and by dancing to the accompaniment of beer, rather than music, they have what they suppose to be a good time. Now and then the daily papers record a drowning at one of these "can-parties," and that is all that the world in general knows of them.

Experience had given Lee Westervelt wider knowledge.

"Now," explained Ben, "we are going right in among those critters; I don't need to tell you that it won't do to be too prudish; when in a can-party, do as the canners do. We must dance—we shall not need any introductions, for life and customs go easy there. Wade right in and be gay. Also keep your eyes open."

"For what?"

"What you can see."

"I need some explanation—"

"Use your eyes."

With this Ben Lomond moved forward, and Lee had to follow his example or fall out wholly. He went along.

If the Sport had been given information as to why all this was necessary he would have gone ahead without hesitation, for he was accustomed to accommodating himself to circumstances, but, as it was, he did not go into the can-party with any great amount of zeal. To him it was simply a gathering of people whose ways did not suit him.

As a dance was then under way, the newcomers stood at one side. Lee watched the men and women curiously. They were rough and ready, and many of them were both dissipated of look and hardened of nature. The Sport was not sorry that he had a revolver in his pocket.

Warm as the evening was the revelers did not seem languid. They whirled about briskly, and a dancing-master would not have complained that they lacked abandon. Stiffness there was none, and some of them—a very few—were graceful as the result of their free-and-easy devotion to the pursuit of the hour.

Presently the dance ended, and the dancers fell back. There was a prompt rush to one side, and then they seized upon a pail and began to drink one after the other.

It was the amusement which gave name to the gathering, and they reveled in the cooling beer.

For a few minutes they stood getting their breath and talking freely and sociably, and then they gave signs of beginning another dance. Lee and Ben were not left behind, and they danced with the others.

The Sport had been doing his best to obey the injunction to use his eyes, but he did not yet see what it meant. One thing, and one only, had thus far impressed him.

Every event has its star; the can-party had its share. Among the dancers Lee noticed a youth who easily took a star position. He was slightly built, and did not seem to be twenty years old, but he was a handsome fellow, and his rough dress gave him a look rather striking, rather than detrimental.

Others thought so, too; it was plain that the girls in the party admired him. They smiled on him, and sought his notice, and, on the whole, elevated him to the position of general favorite.

Other men cast unfriendly looks at him, but he simply danced on with careless ease and seemed happy.

Ben came to Lee's side.

"I see you have noticed the handsome boy," he remarked.

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?"

"A taking fellow, surely. What more?"

"Watch him!"

"Why should I?"

"Watch him!"

The Sport's gaze wandered to Ben Lomond, and then returned to the handsome boy. Plainly, he was expected to see something unusual in the youth, and he tried to do it. The face—somehow, it was familiar, and yet Lee could not remember meeting such a boy. He was rather a novelty even in big New York, and likely to be remembered if known. His eyes, mouth, forehead, general cast of face and—

The Sport started and suddenly fixed a keener gaze. He looked hard, and then turned abruptly to Ben Lomond.

"Is it—"

"Well?" replied Ben, with the shadow of a smile.

"By Jove! that face seems familiar!"

"Where have you seen it?"

Again the Sport turned to the handsome boy, and again he looked hard and long. Then he wheeled upon Ben.

"Either I am woefully mistaken or that is—"

"Who?"

"Roena Rose!"

Ben Lomond laughed a harsh, grating laugh. "Moral!" he replied. "There is something to be learned, even at a can-party. Unless you are mistaken it is as you say, and the dear girl dances on the pier as gracefully as she bats on the races. Odd, isn't it? Go and speak to her!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STREET WAIF.

ON the evening last referred to Elzora Ames was at the Newdick house. She did not forget any of her missionary subjects, and there was substantial aid where she took up the work, but on this occasion she had come on a special errand, and this was to see Jockey Jimmy on

business. Jimmy was out, but he had been sent for, and was now expected. In the mean while the visitor talked with Mrs. Newdick and her daughters.

It required the gifts of a lightning-change artist to do this well; Nell and Rena were cheerful and hopeful, while Mrs. Newdick was not only overwhelmed by her misfortunes, but always looking for more.

Long before Elzora had given up making her more cheerful, so she tried only to listen patiently.

The general conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Jimmy. He did not look very much pleased at sight of the missionary, but he greeted her kindly.

Elzora was not precipitate, but she finally wound around to the object of her call.

"Possibly," she suggested, "you have heard that I have a business situation in view for you?"

"Seems ter me et was whispered in my ears," responded Jimmy, with a slight grimace.

Nell smiled. Her mother and Rena had been talking about the matter until Jimmy was wholly tired of it.

"The place is in a store," Elzora pursued.

"Boss dead?"

"What?"

"Is the boss dead?"

"No. Why do you think that?"

"Thought mebbe he was dead, an' I was ter take his place," gravely explained James.

"Perhaps it may come to that."

"Is he sick? Got liver trouble or inflammation of the left lung? Likely ter have a set-to with yeller fever or small-pox?"

"James!" severely exclaimed Mrs. Newdick.

"Yes'm?"

"No levity to this kind lady!"

"Not a bit of it!" seriously answered the jockey.

Elzora had tried her hand with Jimmy before—she knew his way, and his manner now was not to her encouragement. She hurried on with her business as a measure of self-protection.

"I am not joking, myself. The place is in a store. A boy is wanted there, and, as the business is large, there will be an excellent chance for him, I am told. He will begin at the bottom, of course, but there will be a chance to work up. In a few years he will have an honorable position; far better than horse-racing. Of course the pay will not be large at the beginning—"

"'Bout how much?" inquired Jimmy, gravely.

"Five dollars a week."

"Be the firm men of money?"

"Yes."

"Got heart disease?"

"No. Why do you talk so strangely?"

"Ef their magnificent offer don't bring on heart disease or yeller fever it will be a wonder. Such generosity is appallin'!"

"But there will be a chance to work up—"

"A man that's goin' ter be hung has the same chance."

"But, Jimmy—"

"Would five dollars keep Rena from starving? Would it pay our rent? Would it keep us all in grub an' clothes?"

"But, Jimmy, our society will help you until you work up—"

"To a feller in a store that means until he is about fifty years old."

"But think how respectable it would be."

"Beefsteak an' oranges is better ter eat than respectability."

"How about the race-track?"

"It's in a pretty robust health, thank ye!" replied Jimmy, with a smile.

"Do you meet good people there?"

"Piles o' them."

"Are the associations good?"

"The very best, with me. Some horses have a mean habit of tryin' ter kick daylight through a jockey when at the post, but the run o' them are ladies an' gentlemen—the horses be."

"Jimmy, we are wasting time. I am not here to jest. I offer you a legitimate business position which will take you away from the influences of the race-track. True, the pay is small, but we must creep before we walk. I mention the change only because I think it will be for your good, and I hope you will look at it seriously."

The jockey was not disposed to be aggravating, and when he now saw that Elzora was both hurt and offended his manner changed.

"I know you mean all right, and thank you for your offer, but you see I ain't in a position ter accept. Some boys kin do as they please, but a five-dollar job wouldn't fit me. Look at what we have here! Do you know Rena is sick? Do you know I am bound ter take care o' her, ef it warps my bones all ter corkscrews? That's my position."

Elzora felt that the battle was lost, and her courage wavered.

"But the race-track—"

"Charles Gaston used ter say that a chap could find mischief anywhere he looked for it. I could find evil associates on the track; I could find them anywhere. But I ain't lookin' fer them."

"We do not need to look for such things."
 "They come like toothache an' dyspepsia, eh? That's about right. By the way, do I impress you as a tough citizen?"

"No, but—"
 "Then I reckon I will stick ter the track, an' continue ter keep Rena supplied with somethin' to eat. There is bad in all places, but I'll skip it and sing the first an' last."

With this enigmatical speech Jimmy put on his hat and rose. The missionary knew the talk was over, and she could not help but see that Mrs. Newdick, at least, was relieved that it had taken such a course.

The mother of the family appreciated the dollars Jimmy brought into the family, and, for once, she was right when she thought him proof against the contaminations of the turf. Jimmy had a long head on his shoulders, and knew that to be a rascal was to be a fool. He wanted no part of it.

Jimmy paused, looked curiously at Elzora, and then added:

"Cheer up, Miss Ames. Things ain't half so bad as you think. You are in kinder melancholy work, an' it makes you think this is a tough world. It ain't, unless we are a mind ter make et so. The sun shines fer us all, ef we only hunt fer it. It's a bright an' glorious world, an' the rascals in it only make us thankful we ain't got so weak heads as they have. Lastly an' furthermore, I'm right grateful ter you fer your good will ter me an' the rest of us. You're a trump; you be!"

Jimmy had moved even Elzora to a more cheerful mood, and she decided to let the boy continue in his chosen vocation, and devote her time to making his lot agreeable as it was.

There was little more for her to do there, so she presently took her departure.

Remembering that, on a former occasion, she had encountered Arad Frederickson, she gazed around somewhat apprehensively when she reached the street, but the horse-owner was not to be seen.

Drawing a sigh of relief she walked on, but had gone only a few blocks when a sound of moaning caught her attention. She paused and looked around, but could see nobody.

The moaning continued, however, and she directed her attention to the area beside her. It was a dark point, but she felt sure somebody was there, near the basement gate.

It required considerable courage to investigate, but she pushed the outer gate open and entered the area. She could then see a human form on the flagging.

"What is the trouble?" she inquired nervously.

"Oh! dearie, dearie!" was the reply.

It was a woman's voice, and a feeble voice, and she lost a part of her apprehension.

"Are you ill?" she added.

A moan was the only response, and she summoned new courage and went to the side of the unknown. Then she saw that it was a woman, old and ragged, and she became the missionary in earnest.

"What is wrong?" she persisted.

"Oh! I am sick, sick!"

"Where is your home?"

"I haven't any."

"No home? Where do you sleep?"

"In the gutter."

"If you are sick, why don't you go to those who will help you?"

"Who will help an old woman? Nobody! It ain't the way of the world. People like to help those who are neat and well-dressed, like themselves, but not the poor and ragged. Rags sometimes have contamination, and old age is a crime. Who would help me?"

It was not a bitter complaint, and, though Elzora did not know how big a fraud she might be dealing with, she decided on her course quickly. She would give answer to the old woman's question.

"Come with me," she directed. "No one shall go homeless and ill in New York, if I can help it. Come with me!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

ELZORA endeavored to lift her new charge, and, when the old woman had been urged into doing something for herself, she succeeded. Then they passed out into the street.

Once in better light the missionary saw that she had an aged, feeble charge, and that the face which confronted her own was not that of a depraved person.

Partner questioning brought forth the information that the woman was, indeed, homeless, so Elzora considered what to do. She would have engaged a cab and taken her to her mission, but she did not have the money to do it. The only visible recourse was to go to her own room.

This was contrary to practice, but a change could be made in the morning, she thought.

The aged waif was so feeble that travel was slow, but Elzora supported her to the best of her ability, and they managed to progress after a fashion.

Presently the small side street was left behind for one more frequented by pedestrians, and then

they had observers. Men who were out on all possible errands, but chiefly to have a good time, paused to look at the couple, the one so old and feeble; the other young.

As far as age went the connection was not so strange, but Elzora's charge was so plainly of low rank in life, and the missionary, herself, bore such an air of gentility, despite her simple dress, that it was a wonder.

The lights of Gotham flicker nightly on all sorts of men, and the woman who walks alone is not always safe, but Elzora had a safeguard, on this occasion, in the person of one so feeble that she could hardly stand. Nobody molested them.

In due time the girl's home was reached. She was glad it was so, for her companion was giving out. This fact was emphasized when Elzora's room was reached, for the old woman dropped heavily on the lounge.

"Good, good, good!" she murmured.

"Are you very tired?" asked Elzora.

"Yes, yes, dearie; tired and sick."

"I have a cordial that will revive you. Let me get you some of it."

The missionary believed that her charge was going to sink in an unnatural slumber, but the draught stirred her up in a measure. She still lay with closed eyes, but her tongue began to work briskly.

"So comfortable, so comfortable!" she murmured.

"This is like old times, dearie!"

"You had a home, once, didn't you?" replied Elzora.

"Yes, yes; when we used to be together; when you were young. Those were happy days—deary me! to think I should ever come to this! We had enough to eat, then; yes, and we had gold and jewels. Gold, gold! Oceans of it! Oceans of it!"

"How did you lose it?"

"Bad luck, bad luck! All was gone— But we had it once. Why, I never knew what it was to be hungry, and I could eat a lot. You remember, don't you, dearie?"

"Yes," replied Elzora, to soothe her.

"Gold and jewels, and a home! Ah! those were happy days. They would not let us have them, though, dearie."

"Who took them away?"

"The woman; the other woman!"

The missionary sighed. How many persons could say the same when thinking of the source of their troubles—"The woman: the other woman!"

"She had a guileless face," the patient mumbled on, "but her heart must have been bad; all bad! She robbed us of our home—she robbed you of your husband."

"She meditates on the wreck of some life," thought the girl. "I wonder if the robber was all bad? She stole a husband! Ah! me, what if she stole in ignorance and innocence?"

The patient let little time go to waste. Her eyes remained closed, and it was doubtful if she knew she was with anybody else; her manner was mere like that of one mentally shattered, who dwells in the past and knows nothing of the present.

"Isaac was good until she came and stole him—she, that other woman—the Elzora with the baby face!"

The missionary had started abruptly, and now she sat looking down at her charge, her face suddenly destitute of color, and her expression strange and startled.

"What?" she whispered. "Who?"

The old woman did not hear, but mumbled on as before.

"We might have been happy all our lives, but she stole him away. Oh! the sorrow of it, the sorrow of it!"

Elzora bent close to the wrinkled face.

"Go on, go on!" she whispered, eagerly.

"We were doing nicely when she came, and gold and jewels were ours. Ah! me, were there ever days like those?"

"Your name?" whispered the missionary.

"It is—what?"

"Yes, yes, little Annette, we were happy then. But she stole him away."

"Where is Annette now?"

Before this it had seemed useless to ask questions, but this attempt was more successful. The old woman seemed to think in earnest, and then she responded:

"Oh! Annette, little Annette, where has she gone? Where is she, with her silk-like skin and pink cheeks? A beauty she was, but she did not want to be good. Bad, bad? Yes, they said so, but I knew things they did not know: she was free with her money. What better sign of goodness can anybody show?"

"Was she Isaac's wife, really?" inquired Elzora, persuasively.

"Isaac's wife? Ha, ha! I could tell things of those days that everybody does not know. Ah! I could tell if I would, but I live in hopes of finding Annette. Then I shall again have gold and jewels, for Annette dares not say me No. I could tell too much!"

"What could you tell?"

"All!"

"How did Annette happen to be alive when she had been known as one dead and buried?"

proceeded Elzora.

"Ha, ha, ha! I could tell if I would!" asserted the woman, with a cunning leer.

"What is your name?"

"I never use it now."

"Is it Hannah Sisson?"

The closed eyes suddenly opened. The old woman looked at Elzora sharply, but the return of reason was too much for her. The eyelids dropped, and she sunk into her previous state. Worse, she ignored the question, and, when it was repeated, there was no direct reply.

Missionary work had become a secondary object. In this wild muttering the girl had found something which went direct to her heart, and it affected her so much that she was weak and trembling.

There were reasons why all this went home to her keenly, and there was a ray of hope, too, in her darkened life. Many months before she had tried to find Hannah Sisson—a woman who might by position and association know much of Annette's inner life.

She had failed—and now came this waif of the streets.

Had hope reappeared? Was it possible that Hannah Sisson had been found? The hope sent Elzora's blood almost to fever pitch, but she was not as confident as she wished to be. There was much that was wild and wandering in her patient's speech.

Was there also a portion of reason, mixed with cunning?

If so, could the cunning be overcome?

Little was the girl fitted to be a missionary, then; she had grown weak; she had grown all woman. Beset with hope, she succumbed as she had never done to despair.

Plainly, the time of advance, if such was possible, was not to be that night. Real weariness and slumber were stealing over the old woman. Her mutterings grew to be less, and she gradually sunk into sleep and spoke no more.

Elzora let it be so. Owing to her patient's condition she believed it was not best to urge matters then. The hope was that, another day, gratitude would do something and lead to revelations.

At times in the past the hope had come that something might be done to relieve the painful condition of affairs, if the right way could be found.

Now, the woman upon whom Elzora relied was, she believed, found. What would come of it?

The older woman ceased to move, but Elzora did not leave her side. Hovering over her, and watching her closely, eager to note any possible change, the missionary kept the vigil.

Outside, Gotham was as near asleep as it ever is, but the light never went out in the little chamber. There, Elzora watched for her future, her hopes and her happiness? What would be the result?

After long hours she did stir. She rose, went to her trunk and took out a folded paper. It was her marriage-certificate—the paper which proved that she was Mrs. Isaac Bartley, or—a woman with a wrecked life. And she depended on her patient to save or ruin her.

She pressed her lips to Isaac's name, and then went back to the sleeper.

"Oh! come, morning!" she murmured, tremulously. "Come, and let me know my fate. Let me know happiness or—lasting ruin on earth!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A KNIFE IS DRAWN.

BEN LOMOND's advice to Lee Westervelt was not taken. The Sport had no intention of speaking to Roena. He did not see that he was to gain anything by such a step, and it might result in his losing ground. She had seen fit to take him into her good graces, but it was, he believed, just the reason why she would not want him to know her as a member of a can-party.

"This is most amazing," the Sport observed, presently.

"Why?" Ben Lomond asked.

"I did not think her tastes would lead her here."

"Don't you know nothing is too strange to be true?"

"Yes."

"Then don't quarrel with your eyesight."

"Does Roena make a practice of coming in such gatherings as these?"

"She comes occasionally. After an exciting day at Sheepshead, what is more soothing than to come here and join the can-party?"

There was a sneer in Ben's voice, but Lee did not heed it.

"Is she alone?"

"I see nobody with her."

"Strange adventure!"

"Some people are born adventurous. Now, she likes to fix up as a boy and come here, and have a jolly time. You will argue that a can-party is far below her rank in life. So it is, but that's where the fun comes in, I suppose. She cuts loose from restraint, and feels like a colt in pasture."

"Ben Lomond!" exclaimed Lee, "what do you know of this woman?"

"Nothing."

"I know better. When you lay on the bed at

Jones's you accused her of being the one who tried to poison you. Now, you were not speaking at random; you knew what you were saying. You believed she was at the bottom of the poisoning scheme."

"Wasn't I flighty then?"

"Not a bit."

"Level-headed, eh? Well, the Bushmen always told me the same."

"Ben, you met her in the grand stand at Morris Park. She was so overcome by seeing you that she swooned. Why?"

"She had not seen me in years—that is, I—"

Ben stopped suddenly. He had said something he did not intend to say, and it annoyed him.

"Good, thus far," commented Lee. "Now, she had not seen you for years. You say that, and it is the same as saying she had once known you. Of course she did—why should she have fainted unless she knew you, and was startled by the meeting?"

"Oh! you talk too much like a lawyer!" snapped Ben.

"I will pay you for what you can tell of her."

"Say, comrade, let's join the dance. Here goes!"

Lomond broke off abruptly, and then disappeared among the dancers hastily. The Sport bit his lips with vexation. He felt that Ben could give him information if he would, but the man's stubborn nature was in full play.

Lee could not place Ben Lomond. It seemed that his connection with Roena was one of the past. What had it been? For the moment Lee wondered if they could have been husband and wife, but the idea was speedily dismissed. She might find temporary relaxation in a can-party—but to tie herself to grim, ugly-faced Ben—that was ridiculous.

He abandoned the notion, and well he might. There was nothing in it. Ben had never married any woman, nor was he likely to do so.

The Sport did not care to join the revelers, so he stood at one side and watched. His attention was mostly on the "handsome boy." Roena was still making conquests, and the girls were inclined to smile so much on him that there might yet be remonstrance from the rough cavaliers of the can-party.

The dancers were growing gay. The exercise was exhilarating, but the pastime of sampling the contents of the pail between dances was more exhilarating.

Presently Ben returned to Lee.

"Will she tarry here much longer?" the Sport asked.

"Really, I don't know."

"Some of these people are getting under the influence of the beer."

"It does seem so."

"Drink makes some persons ugly."

"Don't get the notion that Roena will be scared of that. She is not built that way."

Lee's gaze wandered to the outskirts of the crowd. There he saw two men who, he believed, were new to the scene. They stood well apart and had their collars turned up as if the breeze was uncomfortably cool, instead of reviving.

At first view he did not see anything unusual in them, and he was about to change his gaze when a new discovery riveted it to them. His eyes twinkled for a moment, and then he was the cool detective again.

"Upon my word!" he muttered, "this grows interesting."

Lee called Ben's attention to them, and the elder man was not slow to recognize them, also. He did it with a start.

"Hallo, hallo!" he exclaimed.

"I see you know them."

"Rather! It was they that you scared off when they tackled me up-town. Where they go you will generally find yonder woman."

"They do not seem to mix with her now."

"Do you catch their expression?"

"Ugly, I should say."

"Just so. Depend upon it, she did not invite them here, nor did they know of her coming. They are here without her knowledge, and in an ugly mood, sure. I don't suppose that chump of a Meehan cares much, except that he is the satellite of the welcher; but Red Roger is jealous."

"What right has he to kick on what Roena does?"

"None, really, but he is her right hand man—call it her beau, if you wish—and he thinks this a rank breach of sweetheartism, I dare say."

"He is likely to interfere."

"Possibly so."

"Is he dangerous?"

"I don't know why he should do harm to a woman who is of use to him. Roena, with her love for the races and her shrewd betting, is a good person to know. I don't think Roger would break with her. I am in for this dance, old man."

Ben seized upon a young woman and bore her into the thick of the dance, but Lee stood still and watched. He was not so sure that the welcher intended to behave himself.

Roena had evidently danced herself weary for the time being, for she was not in this dance.

She stood by one side, and began a flirtation with a pretty girl.

They were standing side by side when one of the can-party came up and put his arms around both of them. Leesaw this, at first, with scarcely a thought, for he knew it was only the act of a man who had imbibed more than was good for him, but there was soon something more.

Red Roger and Tommy Meehan appeared beside the trio.

The Clear Grit Sport started and moved toward them. There was something ominous in the welcher's manner. A scowl was on his face—he looked vicious enough.

"He does not realize that the embracer is a drunken fool," thought Lee, "and trouble may come of it. I will break up the party, and try to give Roena warning—What?"

There was good cause for the exclamation. Roger's hand had been partially hidden in his loose coat, but he now leaped forward toward the others with the hand exposed.

A knife was clasped in the hand.

"Look out!"

The warning came too late. Roger's leap had taken him to the side of his prey, and the knife-hand fell. The man who had been embracing Roena staggered back, clasping his hands to his side.

"Murder!" he cried. "I am stabbed!"

Outcries were not uncommon among the party, and scarcely a dancer heeded this call, though some nearest the speaker did catch the words and turn.

In the group, itself, there was commotion enough. The victim of the cowardly blow was reeling blindly, and the center of the excited party. Red Roger had seized Roena's arm, blind to all but his jealousy. He glowered on her fiercely, and she returned his regard with real fright. She knew him, and his mood was such that she was terrified.

The welcher bent his head and hissed something in her ears, and there would have been a scene between them if other things had not pressed to the front.

The second girl was more weak than vicious, and when she realized what had been done she added her own outcry:

"Murder, murder!"

The dancing ceased instantly, and some of those nearest leaped toward the spot. All of the male dancers were fighting men, and now they were ready to take hand in the matter, regardless of everything but the desire for a fight.

Quickly all became mixed up, shutting out Lee Westervelt's view, but a deep splash in the water was followed by a new cry:

"Danny Moss is in the river! He has been murdered, and has fallen off the pier. Murder!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUNTERS OF HUMAN GAME.

It was no fault of Lee Westervelt's that he was on the outskirts of the crowd. Events had followed so swiftly, and others had been in such position that he was naturally shut out. Besides, he was reluctant to take too prominent a part, but now he felt that he must do so.

He pushed forward, and tried to enter the mass of men and women, but it was no easy task. They were writhing like so many snakes in vernal coil.

Finally, he was enough in the group so that he knew others were there, too. The scene was lively. Men were hitting out wherever they could see a head, in a true Donnybrook style, and the Sport narrowly escaped some of those blows.

When he did penetrate the mass he found that somebody had been thoughtful enough to remember the man who had fallen off the pier.

"Mickey is after Danny Moss!" was the cry, and some of the party stood close to the edge of the pier and gazed over into the water.

Lee felt that Danny would be looked after, and he gave all his attention to the others.

"Where's the man who did the stabbing?" he demanded.

"Yes, where was he?"

"Who was he?"

"Where's he gone?"

These questions were added to Lee's, and it was plain that in the general excitement the would-be assassin had been lost sight of by all. The Sport looked around eagerly.

He could not see Roena, Roger or Tommy, but this was not strange, so many were on the pier, and their positions were so promiscuous.

Ben Lomond kept close to his ally's side.

"Watch out for them!" urged Lee.

"I will that."

"This may be a murder."

"The welcher tried to make it one."

"Get sight of them."

Both men worked to the same end, but they were still threading the crowd when a cheer announced something of more interest to the can-party. A shrill feminine voice piped:

"Danny Moss is up!"

The stabbed man was up, and he came like anything but a dying man; both he and his rescuer were dripping wet, but one seemed to keep his feet as well as the other. One careful look convinced Lee that Danny had received

only a slight wound, and would never be the worse for the welcher's blow. Danny's own friends arrived at the same conclusion, and there was a general rejoicing.

In the midst of it somebody remembered that they had a grudge to settle.

"Where's the cur that did the stabbing?"

"Yes, where is he?"

They looked for him. So did Lee. With their whole party devoted to the same cause one thing soon became certain to the Sport. Roena, Roger and Tommy had all made their escape from the scene.

"Scatter an' search fer them!" directed a canner. "Danny wasn't the only one who got the knife. The stabber gave the blade to the handsome boy, too."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Then the boy may be dead, too. Scatter, and hunt them down."

The men all hustled off, and Lee and Ben went with them. The positive assertion that the girl had been stabbed by the jealous welcher meant much to Lee, and he wanted to lose no time. If Roena and Roger had fallen out it was just the time to move upon them.

The detective and Ben soon shook off the other men.

"Where away?" asked Ben.

Lee suddenly seized the speaker's arm.

"What do you know of that welcher's gang?" he demanded, peremptorily.

"What do you mean?"

"Their recent history—"

"I know no more than you."

"Is this true?"

"Yes."

"And their past?"

"I ain't got a thing to say now," replied Ben Lomond. "I may talk later on—I really begin to think I may. When she gets so she is bound to kill me by knife, bullet or poison, it's time for me to desert her."

"Desert her?"

"Yes."

"What is she to you?"

"Nothing. Don't look on me so doubtfully. I did see a bit of her in the past, but she sort of drifted out of my sight."

"She was Charles Gaston's niece?"

"Yes. Say, she's an independent critter. She was Gaston's heiress, and he left money, but not a move has she made to get it. Queer that she should let it slip, but she may have decency enough not to want to profit by his death."

Ben had been talking with the air of one who has no especial interest in his subject, and he now broke off suddenly and repeated:

"Which way?"

"Do you keep me company?"

"Yes."

"Then let us take a look at where Roena Rose lives."

"Good!"

They went, but on their arrival they found her premises dark and still. Lee could not decide whether she had returned, and, though he wished to know, he could not afford to take such a radical step as to call. He resorted to an expedient. Going to a telegraph office he sent an inconsequential message by a boy, and then waited the result.

Twenty minutes later the boy returned with the information that the people of the house, on being aroused, had entered Roena's rooms, only to find that they were not occupied.

Lee and Ben lingered for some time longer, hoping that she might come home, but she did not appear.

"Curious what has become of her and Red Roger," remarked Lee.

"Do you remember the claim of the one of the can-party that Roger also struck her with the knife?"

"Yes."

"Then a good deal may have happened since then."

"Yes. Roena may be—"

"Well?"

"Dead!"

"Let us hope she is not," calmly replied Ben. "Still, all things are possible when a jealous man gets to the fore front. Lively things may be going on, elsewhere."

The sport did not reply. He was considering as to whether it would pay him longer to keep the vigil in the street. He was very weary, and the morrow might be a day of action. He spoke to Ben about leaving, and was promptly joined by his companion.

"You speak well. I don't care to moon around here all night. Let us get to bed and to sleep."

"Where can I find you to-morrow, Ben?"

"At the hotel."

"I may call on you. Don't get beyond my reach."

"Certainly not."

They separated and each went his way. Lee's course was home. On reaching that point he found that Nathan Short had just come in, also.

"I wanted to see you!" exclaimed Nathan.

"I have been making some progress."

"We will compare notes. Sit down!"

They sat down, and it was nearly two hours later when they finally retired to rest.

The next morning they were up at the usual hour, and breakfast was disposed of quickly. Then they left the house.

"Nathan," spoke Lee. "I need not ask if you have the programme fully committed to memory."

Nathan touched his forehead.

"I have it here."

"Good! We will proceed on our way, and this may mark the end of perplexity. Let us move on, Nathan."

They separated, and hurried off. The Sport's course was back to the vicinity where Roena Rose had her flat, and he arrived there in due time. Reaching a position suited for a survey he looked up at the windows of her rooms.

"The shades are down," he muttered. "It does not look like an occupied place."

Footsteps sounded, and when he turned he was surprised to see Ben Lomond.

"What! are you around so soon?" exclaimed the Sport.

"Comrade, I am, and I have been here some time."

"What have you seen?"

"A man at Roena's window."

"Ha! is that so?"

"Yes, but it was an hour ago. He pushed the shade aside a bit, but not enough so I could tell who he was. Since then all has been quiet. Still, he ain't gone out."

Lee stood in uncertainty. What was his proper course? He was tempted to invade the house. Would it be best?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TRAIL GROWS HOT.

BEN LOMOND was not so uncertain as to what he wanted to do.

"Let's go in," he suggested.

"Why?"

"No man belongs in them rooms, regular, and it means something when one is there. I'm not in love with Roena's ways, but if she has broken with Red Roger, as seems likely, he would be a bad companion for her to have. She hasn't the strength to beat him in a game of life or death."

"You may be right; it may be our duty to go in. We will do so. I have made some acquaintance with the janitor, and, as he knows me as Roena's friend, he will admit us to the rooms, I think."

The supposition proved correct. The janitor said nobody was at home in Roena's flat, but he thought she would soon come, and the keys were given to Lee. He and Ben went on until they reached the general hall which led to Roena's private hall. The Sport turned to Ben.

"Are you armed?"

"Yes."

"Good! You may need to be, for this party may prove desperate."

He applied the key and turned it in the lock. He threw the door open; they passed into the private hall, and Lee reclosed the door.

"We will—"

"Ha! Look there!"

Lee looked. They were not the only persons in the hall. A man was there, sitting in a chair which was tipped back against the wall. He did not move, and his backward-turned head, drooping arms and open mouth were all suggestive of a heavy sleeper.

"Thunder!" added Ben. "It's Tommy Meehan, the tout!"

It was Tommy, and his presence and condition surprised Lee Westervelt. If the tout was there, might not others be present? The Sport gazed blankly at the sleeper. It was, to say the least, a singular place for a nap. Lee looked in perplexity until Ben added, in a whisper:

"Say, I do believe the fellow is drunk."

"You may be right."

"Shall I shake him?"

The Sport glanced toward the door which led into Roena's rooms. What was there? If all things were as odd as that the tout should sleep in the hall, in a chair, nobody could guess what lay beyond.

"Wait!" finally directed Lee.

He walked to the inner door and laid his hand on the knob. He fully expected it would resist his efforts, but it swung back without difficulty. He gazed inside, though without seeing anybody, but Ben again broke the silence.

"Say, what is that jigger fastened to the door?"

Lee raised his eyes. That side of the door which had been invisible before the door was opened had a paper dangling from the woodwork, and it was strangely held there.

It was fastened by a dagger driven into the panel.

"Well, by thunder!" cried Ben, "that's a queer go! What does it mean? Say, there's writing on the paper. Yank the thing down!"

There was no necessity for urging the point. Lee, himself, had noticed the writing, and he quickly stepped forward, seized the dagger and pulled it out. With his other hand he secured

the paper, and while his companion eagerly hovered near, he read what was thereon inscribed.

"What is it?" demanded Ben.

"If this note tells the truth," exclaimed the Clear Grit Sport, "we must move lively to prevent murder!"

"Murder!" repeated Lomond. "What's that? Who's to be murdered? Read the paper, man; read it aloud!"

Quickly Lee obeyed, and this is what he read:

"I suffer from the wound given me by a bloodthirsty wretch. He will seek me again, and will take my life if he can. I have cunningly drugged the man he set to guard me, and now I flee for my life. Soon I shall be far away. He will follow! If I die, seek my murderer!"

"R. R."

Ben Lomond snatched the paper away.

"Yes, yes!" he uttered, deeply. "That's it—'R. R.'—Roena Rose. The welcher is on her track!"

"The quarrel promises to be lasting."

"She has fled."

"And, I suppose, left no clue behind. What's to be done? Of course Tommy Meehan is the man she claims to have drugged, so it is not likely we could wake him, or that he could tell anything if awakened. How shall we proceed to find Roena?"

"I don't know—I don't know. Can't we do something?—can't we?"

"You seem more than commonly moved."

"She was—Hub! huh! She's a woman, you know."

Ben Lomond had started to say something hastily, but broke off with a nondescript growl, and then finished in a manner very different from that in which he started. All this was noticed by Lee Westervelt, but he had something else to attend to then besides trying to get things out of Ben Lomond.

"I am totally at a loss to know where to seek her," admitted the Sport. "It will be a wild goose chase to pursue, yet—"

"We must go somewhere, and do it at once—"

Westervelt suddenly seized his companion and drew him into the room. The knob of the hall door had been rattled, and he saw that another person was to appear on the scene. Prompt action had made themselves invisible, and Lee had time partially to close the door, yet so he could look out. A man entered the private hall.

"Red Roger!" breathed Ben Lomond.

"Be as still as death. Wait and Watch."

The welcher had stopped at sight of his tool who slept in the chair. The discovery did not please him—that was certain—and he did not move for some moments. Then he stalked forward, seized Tommy by the arm and shook him stoutly.

The tout did not stir, and the shaking grew rougher.

"Here, you! Wake up!" roughly directed Roger. "What in perdition do you mean by sleeping at your post?"

Tommy did not explain, for he was not conscious.

"Drunk!" muttered Roger.

He accepted this explanation without further delay, and then hastened toward the inner door.

This move had been foreseen by Lee, and steps taken to prevent discovery, if it could be prevented. At a motion from his superior Ben had looked to another door, and, when it was found to be a closet, they had a refuge all ready. Now, it was utilized.

Lee and Ben took to the closet.

Red Roger entered. He looked around the room and growled, bear-like, evidently disappointed to see nothing to interest him. The place appeared wholly deserted. He passed on into the next rooms of the flat.

"Say," remarked Ben Lomond, "if he makes anything like a search he will find us here."

"And I fear the search will be made. He does not seem to think Roena is away."

"Pity you didn't leave that dagger-pierced note so he could find it. Can't we hide here, somehow? Seems to be a good many clothes here."

"Of course we can evade a casual search. There are clothes enough, as you say. Why, some of them are men's clothes!"

Lee had been fumbling to see what sort of a barrier could be interposed to prying eyes, and the result was indicated in the last words. He handled some of the garments he had found, and then, growing more interested, pushed the door of the closet back a little and looked at them by stronger light.

"Small sizes, fit for a boy," he added.

"Roena appears to have been 'doing' the town generally."

"It's an odd wardrobe for a woman."

"Listen!"

"What is it?"

"Voices in the other rooms."

"What! has the welcher found something, after all?"

"Angry voices, sure."

"Another person is here, after all."

"They dispute hotly over something."

"One voice is that of a woman! Great Scott! is Roena here, after all?"

The voices suddenly grew clearer, as if the speakers had come toward the hiding men, and Lee opened the closet door still further and gained the desired view. He saw the welcher, and with him was Roena. She looked pale, but she was firm, and in her hand was a knife which told that she had either enmity or fear as ruling passions—perhaps both.

Roger was retreating prudently.

"Put down that carver!" he directed, belligerently.

"I will not give you a chance at my life again!" declared Roena. "I know you as you are, now. I bear a wound in my arm, and you would give me more of the same sort if you could. I shall not let you murder me!"

"Murder? Pah! Nonsense! You talk rubbish!" replied the welcher.

"What about last night?"

"Didn't you deserve a shaking up? I have suspected that you were inclined to flirt, and I found it out then. I was mad with jealousy, and I acted with that feeling at heart. Let bygones be bygones, though; let us be friends."

"I will not, and if you come near me, I strike!" retorted Roena.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DETECTIVE'S TURN COMES.

THE Clear Grit Sport stood impassive and listened and watched. In the past he had learned the lesson that when rogues fall out honest persons often prove gainers. Plainly, a quarrel was now on, but what he was destined to hear he did not know. He eagerly drank in all that followed.

Red Roger regarded Roena and her knife with an air anything but amiable. Her persistent caution gave him no chance to put any scheme of hostility into effect, and it angered him.

"Spitfire!" he exclaimed.

"I am prepared to defend myself."

"Would you strike me?" asked the welcher.

"I would!"

"To strike might mean to kill. A fine specimen of womankind you are."

"I would defend myself," Roena persisted.

"I dare say you would be proud to have my blood on your hands. It counts for nothing that I have given to you all this time of devotion. You promised once to marry me, but I now know that all you wanted was a footman, butler and coachman, combined; and you made me the promise to secure the devotion. I gave it. Fool! I might have known that a woman like you would have no element of honor."

"A woman like me?"

"So I said."

"If I am weak of honor, what are you? Does not my record compare well with yours?"

"Neither smells of clover or new-mown hay," confessed Red Roger. "But, see here, Roena, we must make up—we must, I say. You know the past, and I know it. Say to me if we can afford to fall out?"

"I can't afford to keep in with one like you. Your real nature has cropped out and we are done."

"Traitor!" hissed the welcher.

"Call me what you will; I can bear it."

"Perhaps you can bear it to have the world know you as you are. How would your history read in the daily papers? It would be an interesting chapter where it recorded your trick on Isaac Bartley and Elzora Ames; it would be—"

Roena's eyes were blazing.

"Do you want your own history shown up?"

"I can endure it if you can."

"How about a certain murdered man?" hotly demanded the woman.

"Well, how about it?"

"Who killed him?"

"Who helped to kill him?"

"I struck no blow."

"Who supplied the slung-shot with which the blow was struck? Who planned it all? Who gave the order 'Strike!'?"

"And who struck?"

"Whose errand were we on?"

"Coward! would you tell that?"

"Roena Rose, I will have you back or tell the world the whole truth!" declared Red Roger, fairly trembling with excitement. "I will not lose you. The happiest days of my life have been since you and I formed a partnership to play the races. It has thrown me almost constantly into your company, and I have learned to love you. Love! Yes, strange as it may seem, I do love you. Depraved must be the human heart which is wholly dead to the divine passion which makes good men and women little less than divine, themselves. Ay, and the same passion can lift the ignoble, as it has lifted me. All I hope to be is vested in you. I must have you—I will have you!"

It was a most powerful plea, and Red Roger was all in earnest. The words seemed to shoot from his lips, and all show of calmness was lost. He stretched out his hands to Roena with mute eloquence, and a less hardened woman would have been moved.

The race-track graduate heard [without pity.

"We are done!" she reiterated, firmly and coldly.

"Perdition! is this my reward?" snarled Roger.

Footsteps sounded on the floor, and Lee Westervelt, from his covert, glanced around with the expectation of seeing more of Roger's friends. What he did see amazed him.

In a compact line several persons were advancing—Nathan Short, Isaac Bartley, Jimmy Newdick, Elzora Ames and a bent, feeble old woman.

"Jupiter!" muttered the Clear Grit Sport, "has it come so soon?"

Red Roger heard the footsteps, and he wheeled quickly. He saw the group, and there was every evidence that he did not find it a pleasant sight. His face fell, and some of the color went out.

Nathan, grim and severe, pushed forward until near the race-track pair. Then he came to a halt. His gaze took in all before him. He wound up by fixing a close regard upon Roena.

"I am glad to see you here," he remarked, calmly.

"What business have you here?" demanded Roena, curtly.

"Are we not welcome?"

"No, sir, you are not; and the sooner you get out of here, the better. You found the door when you came in—I dare say you can find it again."

"Presently, my dear madam. When I go, you go with me."

"I do!" cried Roena.

"Yes—under arrest."

She suddenly grew agitated.

"Under arrest? What do you mean? How dare you say—"

Her speech died away. From the first she had scented danger, for Isaac and Elzora were there, but, now, she saw somebody else. A new face had attracted her attention, and, at sight of it, she lost her composure wholly. She lost the power of utterance, too.

Nathan was not blind to the cause of the change, and he pushed the old woman forward.

"Hannah Sisson, at your service," he added.

"Yes, dearie; yes, I'm here!" croaked the old woman.

"Hannah, Hannah!" gasped Roena.

"Your vision is good, madam," replied Nathan.

"I'm here, dearie," pursued the old woman. "They wanted me to come and tell all I could about you, and I have come."

"You can tell nothing—nothing!" declared Roena. "If you did tell it would be a lie!"

Roena was shaking with emotion, and her face was pallid. Now she turned quickly to Nathan, her whole soul in the work.

"Don't listen to her—don't listen!" she exclaimed. "She will lie to you; she will lie, for she is my enemy. Throw her out; she is only a miserable tramp; throw her out. Don't let her lie my life away!"

Nathan had been giving his prey full rein, but now he shut off the line of delay. He stepped closer to Roena and exclaimed:

"Do you longer accuse Isaac Bartley of bigamy?"

"I do, for—"

"Then you speak falsely. I do not rely upon Hannah Sisson, alone, and I have full proof that you are not Annette Gaston, but her sister Anne!"

"That's true!" added Hannah. "Annette died, and this is Anne, but she made me call her Annette, so she could pose as Mr. Bartley's wife. I couldn't help doing it, for she was a money-maker—oh! the gold and the jewels we had!—and she had her way. But this is Anne!"

"Thunder!" gasped Ben Lomond.

Lee Westervelt flashed him a quick glance.

"It seems to hit you hard," remarked the detective. "I am not so much surprised. Nathan and I have been on the trail for several days."

But Ben Lomond rubbed his head in perplexity and muttered:

"One died, and t'other didn't. Have I never known which? Well, I reckon I have, but I thought she was too well fortified to be dragged out of her ambush by me or anybody else. Yes, I did!"

"Let us end vain talk," pursued Nathan, calmly. "I want it to be business-like now, for that's why I am here. Observe those who accompany me and you will see Isaac Bartley and his wife. His wife, I say!" and Nathan waved his hand to Elzora. "Who disputes it?"

Roena's lips moved, but her gaze wandered to Hannah Sisson and she said nothing.

"Isaac and Elzora were married," added Nathan, "but almost in the very minute of the ceremony you—Roena Rose—appeared and accused them of bigamy. Since then you have profited by your claim. How? By blackmail. You bled Bartley, asserting that you would accuse him publicly of bigamy if he did not pay you. He paid."

"But only to protect Elzora!" exclaimed the pilot. "I would not have her name dragged into this wretched business."

"I can well believe you. You would not have paid, however, if you had known that Roena was, really, not Annette, but Anne Gaston."

"I would not have paid, for there would have been no reason."

"Let Hannah Sisson tell what she can."

Roena started forward.

"I protest!" she cried, shrilly. "I protest against this infamous work. Am I to be hunted and hounded—"

"You can talk later. Stand back!"

Nathan's manner was so authoritative that she subsided, and Hannah, who was childishly eager to speak, herself, came into the scene.

"I knew them both!" she exclaimed—"Annette and Anne, sisters. Why, I washed their clothes when they were babes, and I was household laborer in their mother's home when they were children. But the father, George Gaston, and his wife both died when the girls were still in their 'teens.' A pretty pace the girls cut, then!"

"They kind of drifted apart, and each looked out for herself, but I knew them both and saw both now and then. I knew all about it when Annette married Isaac Bartley."

"It came about unusually. He saved her life in a runaway accident, and they, being both young, got foolish, romantic notions into their heads. They thought it was a 'fate' that had brought them together, and they were married off-hand, as I may say."

"Just one month they lived together—just one month, dearies—and then Isaac left her. He said that Annette flirted. Anyhow, they did not agree, and they separated."

"After that Annette took to playing the races, and she made well at it. I was with her, and we lived in clover. Oh! the gold and the jewels!—ah's-me! those were happy days—gold and jewels, gold and jewels! Happy days! happy days!"

"But Annette died. I was with her all the while, and I closed her eyes, and I went to see Anne, and Anne gave me the money to bury her, and I saw it done. But there are plenty to swear it was Annette who died—plenty who knew her well. Yes, yes; Annette is dead, and that is her sister Anne!"

The old woman ceased and pointed to Roena Rose.

"A lie, a lie!" persisted Roena, but the force was gone from her speech and from her manner.

"It is all true," asserted Nathan. "I have looked into this carefully, and I have proof other than the word of this old woman. Annette Gaston Bartley is dead, and there was never a more legal marriage than that of Isaac Bartley and Elzora Ames."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"MURDER WILL OUT."

ISAAC started forward.

"It may seem strange that I did not know Anne from Annette," he exclaimed, excitedly. "Let me tell why I was so deceived. First, I did not know Annette a month when I married her; second, we lived together but one month; third, five years had elapsed since the day when I saw her last and the appearance of Anne; fourth, I had never heard of Anne, and did not know that Annette had a sister, and the resemblance between the two was so striking that I was deceived."

"All is clear now," replied Nathan, "and Elzora is proved your lawful wife."

The young couple moved closer to each other, while Nathan, who had seen Lee Westervelt standing somewhat back, looked at his superior and received a nod which told him to proceed as he was doing.

The allies, Lee and Nathan, had worked on the case together, with Lee always as the controlling spirit, but Lee did not intend to give up his incognito as a "sport," and the nod told Nathan that he was still to continue as the outward leader, and that Lee would remain in the background.

Roena was dumfounded and unnerved. She saw that all of her deceit was out, and that she could no longer play on Bartley's feelings and pocketbook. More, she was in deadly fear lest she be arrested for the extortion of money she had practiced.

Ruin stared her in the face, and it had come so suddenly that she did not know what to make of it. How had it been done? This question had only to enter her mind to lead to other thoughts. She did not know how patiently and persistently Nathan and Lee had been working to clear up various mysteries, and so she judged naturally but hastily—it flashed upon her that she had been betrayed. By whom?

Confronted with this question she found only one solution, and as it was found she turned upon Red Roger Peters.

"Traitor, traitor!" she cried, bitterly. "You have given me away as a part of your contemptible revenge, but you shall not profit by it. I will give you your own medicine; I will have an eye for an eye."

The welcher opened his lips to protest that he was not guilty, but he was too slow. Roena first made sure she had Nathan's attention, and then stretched out her hand to Roger.

"Look!" she cried. "Look, for you will never be better repaid. There stands the man who murdered Charles Gaston!"

"I suspected it."

He glanced at Lee Westervelt, but the placid smile on the Sport's face told that the revelation was no surprise to him, either. It was not, for the detective pair had not been asleep.

The blow fell on the welcher with crushing force. Wide as the breach was between Roena and himself he had not suspected she would utter the words he had heard—there were good reasons why she was likely to be silent. But her viciousness had defeated all, and the deed was done.

He paled and stared at her wholly unnerved.

"Yes," she went on, almost wildly, "it is as I say. Charles Gaston was murdered, and it was Roger Peters who did it."

The welcher's face was distorted as if in physical pain—it moved strangely, and his eyes rolled in their sockets curiously. Never before had he felt anything like this, and with vital peril and mad rage tearing at his vanished composure he took his part in the ill-considered revelation.

"Who helped me?" he shouted, furiously.

"Who planned it? Who asked me to help her? Who was to be the gainer? Who did all the business when we reached Gaston's room? Who had armed me with a slung-shot? Who bade me use it?"

"That is not it!" retorted Roena. "it was you who struck the blow!"

"And you were my ally."

"Why should she be your ally?" craftily asked Nathan. "What object could she have in wanting to kill Gaston?"

"Simply because he was rich, and she was his heiress. She heard he had made a will which would disinherit her. Without a will she would inherit all, for she was his niece, but an adverse will would cut her off wholly. She asked me to go to the house at night and try to steal the will. She offered to go, and she obtained a suit of boy's clothes—"

Roger rushed to the closet, took out the garments he had named, and flung them on the floor.

"That was what she wore!" he cried.

"What reason had she to think the will was to be found?" inquired Nathan, mildly.

"Because Gaston had told some of his race-track friends he had made such a will, and that it was to be found in his room. We went there to get it, under the erroneous impression that Gaston was not in that night."

"And then?"

"We forced the door with a jimmy, but Gaston was there. He rose and dressed himself. He and Roena talked and quarreled. She made a motion, and I struck him with the slung-shot with which she had armed me. He fell and gave no sign of life, and then we ransacked his room. We did not find the will."

"But Gaston was dead?"

"Yes. It was a shock to learn that, on examination, and we got out of the hotel quickly. Once out we saw that a live wire was an agent of death, that night, and I had an idea. We returned to Gaston's room, brought his body out and laid it on the wire, thinking his death would be ascribed to that cause. That's how it came there."

"Clearly explained," commented Nathan, coolly.

"I hope you are satisfied, now you have fixed things for your own death in the electric chair!" snapped Roena, looking venomously at Roger.

"At least, you go down with me."

"I shall not go to the chair."

"Better that than long imprisonment."

Roena's gaze wandered until it encountered Ben Lomond.

"This is a day of exposures," she cried, "and there shall be one more. Yonder skulks a man who hated me, yet he is my uncle. Look on the knave who sees fit to call himself Ben Lomond. His name is really Jacob Hammond, and he is my mother's brother!"

Ben Lomond put out both hands and shook his head.

"Omit claiming me," he requested. "I am not proud of the relationship. You don't give out an atmosphere of clover, niece."

"Don't pose as a saint," snapped the adventuress. "The Gastons always said the bad blood which Annette and I had came from the Hammonds, and I guess it was so."

"Humph, humph!" growled Ben.

"Charles Gaston would never have anything to do with my mother after my father died. He wanted no part of the Hammonds, he said. It was because of this, and because he had seen me and Annette so little, that he mistook me for Annette when I told him I was Annette, just at the time Bartley married Elzora. Gaston took my part feebly, but he soon dropped it."

"Good taste!"

"You can say nothing, Ben Lomond or Jacob Hammond, as you see fit to call yourself. You are all knave!"

Ben Lomond straightened his rugged form.

"I have been a never-do-well," he admitted, "but no crime rests on my conscience. I have wandered about as a tramp and a scum of society, but I defy anybody to prove evil doing against me. If they could I wouldn't care a rap. I, too, hated Charles Gaston. Years ago we quarreled, because of his sneers against the

Hammonds, and his bitter speeches to me. We fought, and he beat me severely. I did not see him again until ten years later. Then we met in Jones's hotel. We had several wars of words there, and another fight, and it was because of our quarrels that I was temporarily suspected of killing Gaston. I had no part in the killing, but this I will admit: Roger and Roena failed to rob Gaston, because I had robbed him in advance. I did it out of spite. Here is the result!"

The speaker produced several papers. "This one is Gaston's will. He gives all he owned to create a fund for disabled jockeys—a noble thing to do!" concluded Ben with one of his old-time sneers.

"We are glad to know you as you are, Mr. Ben Lomond, for you have been a mystery not to be penetrated. One question: You have visited Elzora at least once since Gaston was slain. Why?"

"Partly to worry her," unblushingly confessed Ben; "and partly because I knew she wanted to get certain papers, or was anxious about papers Gaston might have left."

"All that was simple. She was not free from the danger of being involved in a bigamy matter. Gaston had not given her away publicly, but she feared she might have left a statement of the facts. She was interested in papers he might possibly have left."

"Humph, humph!" grumbled Ben.

"Our friend Red Roger," added Nathan, "visited Elzora one night to see what she had in the way of papers. He then called himself 'Jack Sheppard,' and was disguised. His companion of the venture was Tommy Meehan, the tout. You see, Roena did not come forward to claim her position as Gaston's heiress, but she was only waiting until her claim would awaken less comment and thought. She would have appeared in due time, and she feared that Elzora might have papers that would do harm—a possible statement from Gaston."

"Well, all plots have failed."

"And the mine is sprung," added Nathan. "This morning I was far enough advanced to feel sure of my position, so I went to Elzora's house. I found her with Hannah Sisson and Bartley—the latter having been summoned when Hannah began to prove valuable. I brought them here, and here they are. Hannah is not unknown to the police as a common beggar, but she is not the worst of women, and her statements, now, are corroborated by other things."

During this talk the Clear Grit Sport had kept well back, so he had been noticed only by Nathan and Ben. Nathan now observed him slipping wholly away, so the subordinate detective hastened to the hall and joined his chief.

"Is all well, Lee?" he asked.

"Yes. You have done nobly."

"Are you going to keep out?"

"Yes. The case is well in hand. Nathan, you and I made no error when we studied the Gaston murder out, days ago."

"We guessed the whole truth. Lee, do you still insist on letting me wind this case up?"

"I do, Nathan. Press it before the public, and I will still remain, as far as the public is concerned, no more than the Clear Grit Sport. Now, take your prisoners to Police Headquarters, Nathan. The web is spun!"

There remained nothing to do but gather the loose ends of the fabric. Roena Rose, Red Roger and Tommy Meehan were all arrested, imprisoned, tried and convicted. The welcher escaped the electric chair by dying of a fever, but Roena and Meehan are serving time in Sing Sing Prison. Arad Frederickson took a sudden notion that the climate of the East was not good for him. He sold out his horses and went to the boundless West.

Jimmy Newdick lost nothing by it. He still rides for the new owners. Whether he will change his calling, later, as requested by Elzora, remains a problem. Nell Newdick has made a good marriage, so the whole family are safe from the stings of poverty.

Isaac and Elzora repeated their marriage as a matter of form, and are now living in happiness. The mission cause lost something when Elzora gave up the work, but what it lost, Isaac gained. He gained a wife.

Ben Lomond lingered for a while, and then dropped out of sight. Nobody knew where he went, and his past and his future are alike bazy and uncertain. He was grim and eccentric, but not the worst of men.

Lee Westervelt and Nathan Short continued their partnership, and with the old success, as new cases are grappled with and solved triumphantly, but it is Nathan who appears before the public. Lee remains a secret worker, and the general world knows him only as the Clear Grit Sport.

THE END.

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